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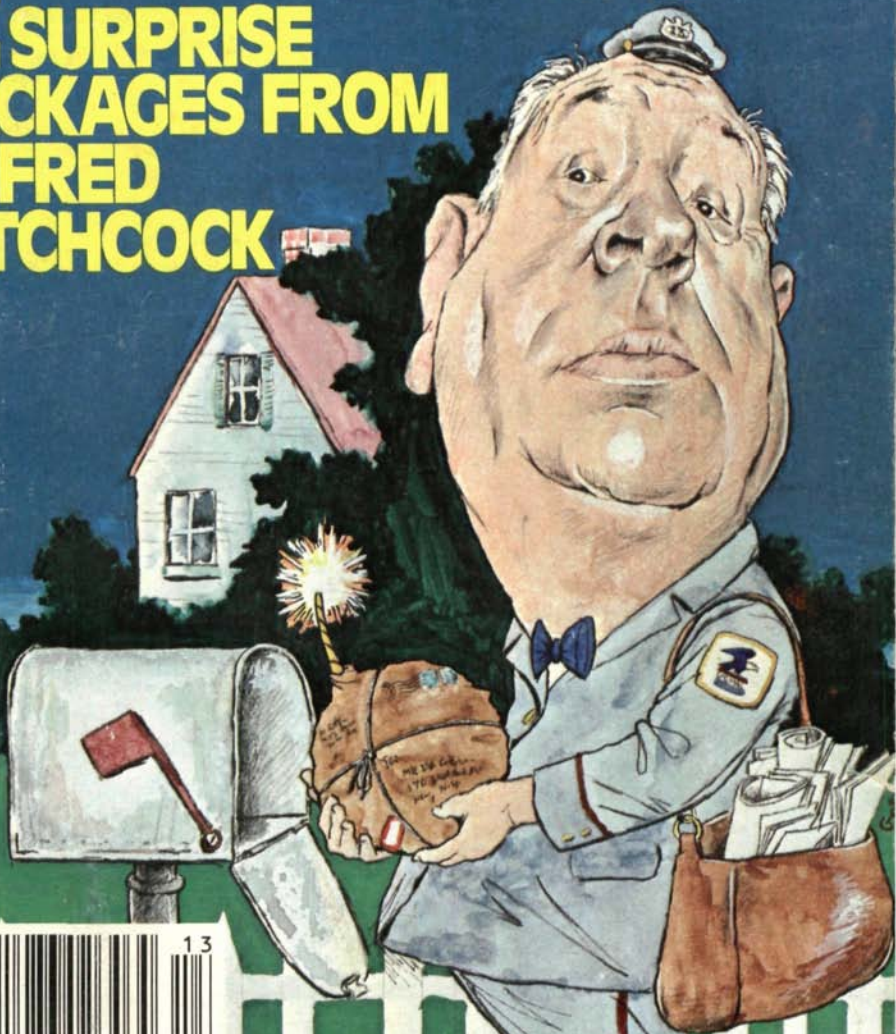
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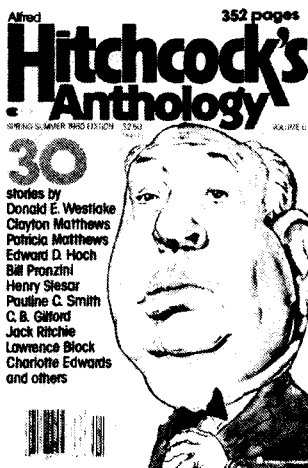
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VOLUME 25, NO. 3

MARCH 26, 1980

ALFRED

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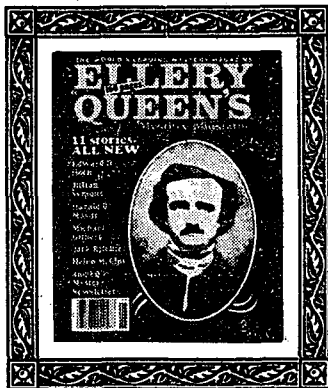
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March 26, 1980



Dear Reader:

Detectives and criminals aren't always just detectives and criminals—often they have outside professions, and sometimes their involvement with crime stems directly from their jobs.

In this issue, for example, you'll meet Percy Spurlark Parker's hotel owner/detective Bull Benson in "Lady Luck." A sportswriter who follows a baseball team turns sleuth in "Road Trip" by Dick Stodghill. A house painter gets caught up in a death trap in "The Last One To Know" by William Bankier, and a meek bookkeeper indulges in murderous fantasies in Ernest Savage's "How Do I Kill Thee?"

The eerie atmosphere may chill you in Jon L. Breen's tale about a mysterious race horse called "Silver Spectre" and the unfolding of a harrowing plot will thrill you in "A Deal in Dust" by Dale L. Walker. And though none of the twelve stories in this issue is intentionally lethal, you may die laughing at the would-be heisters who bumble their way through Mary Ruth Furman's "The Odds Are Even."

I've been asked to remind you to keep writing to the Letters Editor, Susan Calderella. The address is: 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.

Good reading.

Reynold Stichecock

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Ollie Hymes was as dead as he was ever going to get . . .

LADY LUCK

by
**PERCY
SPURLARK
PARKER**



Big Bull Benson took a deep drag as he lit his cigar. The tobacco was light and fresh and welcomed the flame from his gold lighter. He blew the smoke out in a slow billowing stream, looking steadily at Sergeant Vern Wonler who sat across from him on the couch. Vern's long dark face held no warmth of recognition for their years of friendship. Vern was all cop now, and the business at hand was murder.

"Where's Sam, Bull?"

"I haven't seen him since last night."

It wasn't a lie. Sam held the slot as his head bartender, and Bull hadn't seen him since closing time last night. But he wasn't about to volunteer the fact that he'd been rapping with Sam over the phone less than twenty minutes ago. Sure, he and Vern were tight—they'd done some things as kids that should've gotten them thrown under the jail. And there wasn't a cop on the force he trusted as much as Vern. But in a lot of ways, he and Sam were tighter. It had been Sam who'd taken the punk kid off the streets and taught him the beauty in a deck of cards. He had never thought his big mitts could be graceful with the pasteboards, but Sam had taught him how to stack a deck in what appeared to be an innocent shuffle till dealing seconds and thirds became as easy as putting on one shoe after another. But Sam taught him these things for defensive purposes only, things to look for when he was sitting with strangers.

"Gamblin' is knowin' the odds an' makin' 'em work for you," Sam had said. "Treat Lady Luck like a lady, an' she'll take care of you."

Sam's schooling culminated a few years back at a high-stakes game where Bull won the deed to his hotel. A lounge took up most of the first floor of the hotel, which he quickly renamed the Bull Pen and brought Sam in with him.

"Let's cool the lying from the get, O.K., Bénson?" Charlie Evans, Vern's partner, was standing behind the couch. He had never gone in for the afro, keeping his hair cut short, which seemed to go with his puffy square-chinned face. Charlie had as much use for Bull as a drummer with a headache, and he never pretended otherwise.

Bull pulled gently on the cigar, leaned back in his chair, and scratched at the corner of his moustache—taking his time, letting the play form in his mind. "Look, you dudes bust in here without so much as a good morning and expect me to start popping off with the answers. Well, man, I don't know where Sam is. He should be at home. Have you tried there?"

"We wouldn't be here if we hadn't," Charlie said.

"You know, cops for breakfast ain't the best way to start off a Monday morning." Bull straightened himself and tried to get the right amount of concern in his voice. "Lay it out for me, Vern. How serious is this thing?"

Vern grimaced. It was easy to see he wasn't buying the acting job. They'd known each other too long for lies to work well between them. "O.K., Bull. Sam's running scared and I guess I'm suppose to believe he hasn't contacted you for help. Well, I know better, pal. You're sitting

there thinking about what you have to do to get Sam out of this mess, but there's too much heat on this one, Bull. The only thing you can do for Sam is advise him to turn himself in, and back out of it from there."

Bull waited.

"Want me to lay it out clearer than that? The Feds have been on Ollie Hymes's back ever since his release from prison three days ago. They had him pretty well covered until this morning when he gave them the slip, then wound up dead two hours later in Sam's apartment. So you've got us *and* the Feds in on this, which means you stay out, or so help me you and Sam'll get to share a cell together."

After they left, Bull hit the kitchen and started throwing some breakfast together, letting what he knew straighten itself out in his mind. Ollie Hymes had been involved in a string of suburban bank and savings-and-loan jobs that netted him and his partner around ninety grand. Mutt and Jeff would've been a good name for the team, with Ollie being the big dude, but because they both wore phony beards the papers had labeled them the Smith Brothers. Their full getup actually consisted of wide-brimmed hats pulled low over their eyes, the beards, double-breasted dark suits, black leather gloves, and a pair of sawed-off pump guns that did most of their talking. It had ended with Hymes getting shot up pretty badly and his partner barely getting away. Hymes never talked, and he did fifteen years of hard time for his silence. The cops had rattled Hymes's every known acquaintance who fit the size of the missing Smith Brother and Sam had fallen into that category. They leaned on him heavily before turning their attention elsewhere.

Bull scooped up his eggs and sausage, poured himself a big mug of coffee, and took four slices of toast from the toaster. He was carrying about five pounds more than his normal 270. He had decided long ago that if he ever lost weight he wasn't going to do it by starving himself.

He sat at the table and began to eat. Whether he was going to get involved or not wasn't the question that occupied his mind. He needed to decide what was best for Sam.

Sam's call had awakened him from a deep sleep, but the grogginess had split when he heard the urgency in Sam's raspy voice.

"I got my ol' butt in the wringer this time, Bull."

"Spell it out, Sam."

"Ollie Hymes. He's up in my place with a bullet hole in his chest. He's as dead as he's ever going to get."

"You do it, Sam?"

"Hell no, but the cops are gonna think so. He called me last night at the bar, said he was gonna come by this morning, he had a favor to ask me for ol' time sakes. So I was up this morning waitin' for him when I hears this gunshot out in the hall. I opened the door and he stumbles in.

"I learned a long time back to take cover when somebody's shootin', but I guess I wasn't thinking right. I ran out to see if I could spot anything, but all I got was a bunch of folks shoutin' and pointin' at me. My head started buzzing 'bout the heat the cops gave me before with Ollie and I just kept running. It was a dumb play. With all the preachin' I've done 'bout knowin' the odds, I sure went dead against them this time."

"Well," Bull had told him, "we're not ready to fold our hand just yet. Plant yourself in some hotel and give me a call to let me know where you are. I'll get a hold of Chet and we'll figure something out."

Besides being a close friend, Chester K. Lonsworth was a wicked stud-poker player and the head of the largest black law firm in the city. Keeping Sam under wraps permanently was an impossibility. Having him turn himself in as Vern suggested was the best bet. But Bull wasn't going to have Sam walk into any police station without Chet at his side.

He was right by the phone when it sounded and caught it on the first ring.

"Bull?" It was Sam again.

"Yeah, Sam, where'd you hole up?"

"The Lakeside."

"Fancy."

"Why not? If they throw me in jail it's gonna be a long time 'fore I gets to enjoy any more comforts in life."

"Ice that. If it comes to any charges I'm sure Chet can arrange bail. The way it's coming across to me is that the cops have got it figured Hymes expected to have some of that bank money waiting for him for keeping his mouth shut all these years. Now, either the missing Smith Brother didn't have any of the dough left or he didn't want to part with it and offed Hymes to end the partnership and keep the cops from tipping to him. Since you'd been quizzed before and Hymes met his maker in your place that tags you as it. It's nice and easy for them that way. Just

the way they like it—saves them a lot of shoe leather.”

“Yeah,” Sam said slowly. “It lines up that way to me too.”

“Well, I don’t figure on making it that easy for them. I thought I’d nose around a bit, maybe throw some things their way that’ll make ’em get out and work. But I need some names from the old days. Some dudes who might’ve been in on this thing with Hymes.”

“I’ve been bustin’ ma head on some names too, Bull. Not too many cats still around from back then. I could only come up with a couple. Lemar Summers and Dave Tucker. Know ’em?”

“I remember Summers. He was into a bunch of things before he got that clothing store downtown. Hustling, numbers—even ran a book once, right?”

“Yeah, that’s Lemar. Cops gave him as much trouble as they did me back then when Ollie was caught. We’re both ’bout the same size.”

“What about this Tucker dude?”

“Dave’s a different story. He wasn’t in on those bank jobs with Ollie. The cat’s almost as big as you. And there’s been bad blood ’tween him and Ollie for years. Somethin’ to do with some bread Ollie was ’pose to ’ve cheated him out of a ways back. But I don’t know if Dave’s still around. It’s been a year since I saw him. Runnin’ a newsstand on the west side, around Central someplace.”

“Well, it’s a start anyway, Sam. Look, have you got any idea where Hymes was staying?”

“With Bess Warren, I guess. Now there was some lady. Used to wear the highest spike heels ya ever saw. Gave her a couple of inches on me but it didn’t stop me from makin’ a play on her. She went for the money cats. Whoever had the dough had her time.

“Things changed when she and Ollie connected. They were a hot number back then. But she got banged up somethin’ awful in a car accident a little after Ollie was sent to prison. Permanently paralyzed, I think. She was livin’ on the west side somewheres last I heard, but I ain’t sure where.”

“She sounds like a lady I need to talk to,” Bull said. “She might be able to provide me with some names.”

After instructing Sam to stay put, he got lucky and found Bess Warren’s number and address in the phone book. There was no listing for Dave Tucker, but Lady Luck smiled on him again and he caught Chet Lons-

worth in his office. Chet was going to be tied up with court appearances until three-thirty, so they made arrangements to meet at the Lakeside with Sam at four.

It was a little after twelve by the time he got in his Caddy and headed downtown for Lemar Summers' clothing store. He had a lot of running around to do, but if he got the right pieces for the puzzle Sam wouldn't have any worry from the police. Traffic was light and he made it downtown without any hassle. There was a self-park across from the clothing store. He found an empty slot on the second level, parked, and took the stairs to the street rather than wait for the elevator.

Summers wasn't after the quiet elite. The walls in his place were metallic slabs of red and gold. The costumed manikins displayed the same boldness either in color or style, and the Commodores jammed loudly over the speakers, keeping the customers in a partying mood, a spending mood. The threads were priced high enough to throw any mother's son into heavy debt.

"May I help you?"

She was a foxy little number, decked out in orange slacks with a halter top, milk-chocolate complexion, and pale-tan eyes. Every time she smiled some dude would probably decide he needed another pair of slacks or a shirt, or that the yellow striped tie was just the one he'd been looking for.

"I'd like to see Mr. Summers," Bull said, resisting the urge to turn the conversation to a more personal level.

"Is he expecting you?"

"No, but I'm sure he'll see me. Tell him it's Bull Benson, a friend of Sam Devlin."

She started to turn, then swung back. "Benson? You don't happen to own that hotel and lounge out south, do you?"

He nodded. "Yeah, that's me."

"Nice place. Me and some of my friends have been out there a couple of times."

"If you ever make it by there solo, look me up."

"I'll surely do that," she said, winking.

Summers' office was muffled from the blast of the music and the dusk-blue walls were drab compared to those out front.

"Grab a chair, Bull. Good to see ya again."

The years hadn't done much to Summers—thinned and greyed his hair

a bit, but that was all. The cops had quizzed Summers and Sam about the Smith Brothers' bank deal. Seeing him again it was easy to tell why. Summers had a few more pounds on him than Sam, but otherwise they were the same size.

"I suppose you've heard about Ollie Hymes?" he said, taking a chair before Summers' desk that gave a little moan under his weight.

"Yeah," Summers said, rubbing his narrow chin. "Tough thing to happen to ol' Ollie. Gets out of jail and bang! Word is that Sam did the number on him. How straight is that?"

"What do you think?"

"It doesn't strike me as being right. Not Sam anyways—not his kind of action."

"Well, we agree on that. But the cops aren't convinced."

Summers shrugged, his tailored shoulders raising and lowering in a smooth move. "I kind of expected the cops to come by here today, but I guess if they got their sights set on Sam I won't be seeing them."

"Yeah. That's why I'm here."

Summers' small mouth worked itself into a slight frown. "What're you trying to say, Bull?"

"Nothing. Just looking at this thing from a few different angles. Somebody killed Hymes. If we both agree it wasn't Sam, then who did?"

"Well, it wasn't me, Bull, so look somewhere else."

"What time did you get here this morning?"

Summers shook his head, the frown still there. "You're going to push this thing, huh? O.K., I got here at eight-thirty, and the help started floating in at nine-thirty, quarter to ten. Would you like to know what I had for breakfast?"

"Maybe not what—but where?"

"The joint across the street. I'm there every morning I work." His frown deepened. "Why don't you just forget about this? I didn't kill nobody. I ain't even placed a bet on the ponies in I don't know how long. Did you take a good look around when you came in? I've worked my tail off here for fourteen years getting this place where it is today. I've turned my back on the old days and the old ways, Bull. You won't find anybody any cleaner in this town."

Patience wasn't one of Bull's strong points. When it came to something that required finesse he really had to work at it. Actually, if he had the slightest hint Summers knew something that would help Sam, he'd as

soon bounce Summers off the walls until he came up with the information. But that kind of play wasn't called for yet.

"When the cops checked you out after they caught up with Hymes—can you think of any names you didn't give 'em?"

"Who says I gave them any names?"

"Why wouldn't you? I'm sure Sam probably gave them your name, and you gave them his. It's a natural thing to do. They were trying to pin a heavy rap on you and you gave them somebody else to look at. What I want to know is if you thought of someone who might really've been in with Hymes, and kept it to yourself 'cause it was the healthy thing to do."

Summers leaned back in his chair, taking a deep breath. "I'd appreciate it if you didn't spread this around, Bull. I gave the cops every name I could think of. It wasn't like finking on anybody. I still don't know who was tied into those jobs with Ollie. I just dropped some names to get them off my back."

"So who else did you give 'em besides Sam?"

Another deep breath with an accompanying frown. "Hell, I guess it ain't hurting nothing now. There was Mac Tremain, Fingers Howard, both of the Brown cousins, Richy Richards, and Lou Two-Step. But half of them cats are dead now, and I ain't seen the others in years."

"Did you throw them Dave Tucker?"

"Tucker? What for? Cops were looking for somebody my size. Tucker's as big as a house. 'Sides, he and Ollie didn't get along. He said Ollie cheated him in a card game once and Ollie busted him up pretty good—put him in the hospital for a week." He brightened. "Hey, Tucker always talked about settling things with Ollie, even after Ollie was sent to prison. Maybe he's your man, Bull."

"Could be. You seen Tucker lately?"

"Not for a while. Heard he was pushing papers on the west side."

Bull didn't feel he was going to get much further with Summers just now. "Spreadin' the crap around in a poker game is one thing," Sam had said years ago. "But it's the folks who volunteer lies ya have to watch out for."

It was something, like many things Sam had taught him, that he never forgot.

Bess Warren lived in a housing complex of three-story brick jobs the

city had made quite a fuss over five or six years ago when the complex was new. Inferior workmanship and materials had quickly turned the complex into a dump, while the city officials looked the other way.

The chick who answered the door could have been a beauty if she took a little more time with her makeup. She was young—early twenties, no more. Her afro was snarled, her eyeliner too heavy, and her rouge didn't blend in with anything.

"Haven't you cops bugged us enough?"

"I'm not the heat, lady, and I could be a friend."

The anger in her face melted and he got a quick glimpse of what she would be like with all the junk washed off. She could be more than a match for the toy he'd met at Summers' store.

"Look, I'm sorry for jumping at you, mister. It's been kind of a rough day."

"Yeah, I know. It's about Hymes that I'm here. I'd like to see Bess Warren if I could."

"With all the cops parading in here, Mama's not up to too many visitors right now."

"I'll make it short. Please."

She hesitated for a long moment, then stepped back and let him in. The place was just as rundown inside as out. A faded cover was thrown across a lumpy couch. An armchair sat next to a curtained window, cotton showing through one armrest. An old TV stood in a corner, one of its antennas hanging at an awkward angle. Throw the TV away and it could have been his place when he was a kid.

"You got a name?" she asked.

"Your mother might've heard of me. Bull Benson."

The anger was back—tight eyes, curled mouth. "How many friends do you want? Isn't Sam Devlin enough?"

"Look, I'm not trying to jive you, doll. Your mother doesn't want Hymes's killer caught any more than I do. I just don't happen to believe Sam did it, that's all."

She settled some, but not much.

"All I want to do is ask her a few questions. I've known Sam for a lot of years. Believe me, he's not capable of killing anybody."

"Carol, who's that out there with you?"

She looked over to the far wall where a door stood slightly ajar, then back up at him, the curl in her lips still there.

"Carol?"

She let loose with a short harsh sigh, said, "Come on," and started for the door.

Bess Warren seemed to be sinking into the mattress she was on. There was a wheelchair at the side of her bed, but from the looks of her she hadn't gotten much use out of it lately. She was bone thin. Her skin seemed dry and slightly ashy, her eyes dark, circled with shadows, and her short grey hair was matted about her head. She'd been a knockout in her day from all reports, but the only claim she had to that now was her daughter.

"Bull Benson—yeah, I remember you. Ol' Sam's protégé." Her voice was weak—calling to her daughter seemed to have sapped what strength there was. "Sam talked you up a lot, boy. Ollie always planned to sit in on a game with you." The tears swelled up suddenly, and she dabbed at her cheeks with a crumpled tissue she'd been holding.

Carol had left them alone, and he now felt completely out of place. Bess Warren needed comforting, not questions. "Look, I'm sorry," he said. "I shouldn't be here."

"No, no, that's all right. I'll be O.K. It's just that I waited so long for my man to come back to me, and now he's gone again. We pay for our sins, I guess."

He didn't try to answer her. He figured there was something in everyone's past that they'd have to do penitence for one day.

"I lived a wild life, Bull, wilder than most, and I didn't slow down when Ollie and me got together. We were some pair, and he was good to me. Treated Carol like she was his own. Ollie was the closest thing she had to a real father, and he was only around her for a little while." She paused, licking at her dry chapped lips. "Did Sam kill him, Bull?"

"I don't believe he did."

She nodded. "You say no, the cops say yes. Who knows the answer?" "Maybe a dude name Dave Tucker. Know him?"

A wrinkled smile broke across her lips. "Davey? Sure. We went together once. Damn, I'd almost forgotten about him. It was at a poker game Davey took me to that I met Ollie. Ollie came on real strong. A lot of smooth talk and flashing a big roll. I left the game with Ollie. He was big time. I never missed the chance to do better for myself. They tangled about a week or so later and Davey ended up in the hospital. You can't tell from the way I look now, but it wasn't the first time I had

men fighting over me."

"I bet," he said, winking.

"Bull—" the tired eyes looked at him firmly "—Davey carried a big hate for Ollie from then on. If he's still around, maybe he's the one."

Carol was waiting for him when he left the bedroom, and she walked him to the door. She was more relaxed now, her expression less challenging.

"I overheard you and Mama talking," she said. "I guess I'll try an apology that sticks this time."

"No need."

"But I want to. I'm really sorry, Mr. Benson." She paused, looking away from him for a moment. "You see, Ollie getting killed has kind of blown things apart for me too. I was six when he was sent to prison and Mama had her accident. Grandma came to live with us and took care of me and Mama while I was in school. Then Grandma died when I was in my senior year of high school, and that just ended any plans of college or a personal life.

"Don't get me wrong, please. I love Mama very much. She never asked to be crippled. But I thought when Ollie got out of prison he'd take over caring for her, and for the first time I'd start living for myself. He came in Friday night and it was wonderful. You should've seen how Mama perked up. This old dump ain't never heard so much laughter. I was feeling so good I didn't even go to work this morning. I was window shopping, making plans. Then I happen to catch one of those news bulletins over the radio."

The Warren women seemed to have cornered the tears market. Carol's eyes got glassy and her lower lip trembled as she fought to hold them back. "Find this Tucker, will you, Mr. Benson? Somebody's got to pay for this."

He fired up a cigar when he got back in the Caddy. A shot of hundred-proof bourbon would've been nice too. He couldn't help feeling for Bess and Carol Warren. A lot of tears are shed over lost dreams. Their dreams, although separate, had been tied to one ex-con who'd gotten himself blown away three days after his release from prison. The world hadn't dealt them too many good cards.

He hit three newsstands before he found anyone who knew Dave

Tucker and where he could be located. Tucker had a box on the corner of Central and Pine. Copies of the dailies sat on milk crates on either side of the open door. The dude inside was wearing a dingy T-shirt, showing a lot of old muscles that were turning to fat, and flipping through a copy of *Penthouse*. B. B. King drifted out of the radio on the shelf next to him.

"Dave Tucker?"

His attention came up from the centerfold, a little puzzlement in his eyes, a trench forming across his wide forehead. "You win the sixty-four dollars, mister. What can I do for ya?"

"I'd like to get your opinion of what went down today about Ollie Hymes."

There was no change in his expression. "Who's asking?"

Bull told him.

Tucker nodded. "Benson, huh? Yeah, you and Sam Devlin. Well, from one poker player to another, Ollie was the fifth ace in anybody's deck. What do I think about him getting offed? It should've happened years ago. But I kind of get the feeling you knew that."

"Some folks have said you and Hymes weren't exactly kissin' cousins."

"The folks was right."

"Did you kill him?"

Tucker tossed the *Penthouse* aside, rubbed a fist into the palm of his other hand. "Y'know, I'm not too old that I wouldn't take a swing at you."

"Yeah, and you're not too old that I wouldn't swing back," Bull said, readying himself, not sure what Tucker would do.

After a moment's staring contest, Tucker relaxed, grinned. "Ain't no reason to get physical anyway. I was right here when Ollie got it. I pull a long day on this corner, from six to six. Come by in the morning and check my regulars. They'll tell you I was here."

The alibi rolled off like it was rehearsed.

Bull had challenged pat hands before, in games where he was the winner, or when he was holding some strong cards himself. This wasn't one of those times.

Sam and Chet were waiting for him at Sam's room at the Lakeside, along with a bottle of hundred-proof Granddad. He fixed himself a double on the rocks and drank half of it before telling them of his conversations with Summers, the Warrens, and Dave Tucker. He and Chet took the

two chairs and Sam sat on the corner of the bed.

Chet smoothed his greying moustache with thumb and forefinger. "Well, so far, Bull, you haven't said anything that's going to keep Sam out of jail."

"Yeah, I guess you're right. What are the chances for bail?"

Chet shrugged. "It could go either way. If they overlook Sam's association with the notorious Bull Benson and they don't dig back too many years, we might make it. But there's always the chance we'll run into a judge who'll want to be hard-nosed about it."

Sam ran a hand over his bald dome. "The way ma luck's been goin'," he said in his sandpaper voice, "we'll get the hard-nosed judge for sure."

Bull finished the last of his bourbon and let the taste settle in his mouth. "Well, I don't like the idea of turning Sam over to the cops."

"It don't set too well with me either," Sam said.

Chet leaned forward in his chair. "What other options do we have?"

"Not too many," Bull admitted. "Let's go over this thing again. Sam, what time did Hymes get hit?"

"Little after eight-thirty. He said he'd be by my place by nine."

"O.K. So we got Tucker, who didn't try to hide his bad feelings for Hymes. But he paraded his alibi so fast he has to be sure it'll hold up."

"Yes," Chet said, "but that doesn't mean Tucker didn't hire someone to make the hit."

"Right. But if Hymes was killed because of the Smith Brothers deal, that throws it back to Lemar Summers. Summers opened his clothing store a year or so after Hymes was sent up. The missing money could have been used to finance that. I couldn't make my mind up about Summers. He seemed a little too jittery to be the completely honest man he wanted me to believe he was. And his alibi for the time Hymes got it is a little shaky too."

"Looking at the odds 'tween the two," Sam said, "Lemar's our man. He didn't want to start the partnership up again, and he was waiting for Ollie when he got to my place."

"But how do we prove it?" Chet asked.

"Yeah, how?" Bull echoed, sitting back and letting the whole thing soak in. There had to be something he'd overlooked, some key that would make it work in their favor. Sam had preached to him endlessly about knowing the odds, about not making any sucker plays. But Sam had got rattled when Hymes fell dead in his apartment this morning. Sam had

turned his back on the odds, and they had had to play catch-up all day. But thinking now, paying attention to the odds, there was really only one way it could have happened. He got up and started for the phone.

"Well?" Chet said.

"Well, if I'm right, we'll make Sam buy us dinner tonight."

"You better be right about this, Bull," Vern told him as they walked toward the door.

"Yeah," Charlie offered behind them, "or you're heading directly to jail and you ain't passing Go."

Bull let it lie. There had been sparks between him and Charlie since day one and he doubted if the situation would ever change.

Carol answered the door and there seemed to be some surprise in her face in seeing them there. A smile started, then faded quickly into a wide-eyed stare. He made the introductions and had her take them to her mother.

"You can stay this time, Carol," he told her as Charlie slid over and blocked the doorway.

She stood with her back to him for a moment, then moved over to the bureau in the corner, not looking directly at anyone.

"What's this all about?" Bess Warren asked from the bed. "Did you find Ollie's killer? Was it Dave?"

He went around to the side of the bed. "No, Tucker didn't do it, Bess. But I think I've got the killer pegged."

He watched her take in the whole room, her eyes darting from face to face and then settling back on him.

"You and Hymes must've laughed a long time, having the cops tear up the city looking for two black dudes—when one of the Smith Brothers was a woman."

There was no reaction from her at first. Then she gave a slight nod, and a hint of a smile appeared on her thin lips. "Somebody finally figured it; huh?"

"You kind of told me," he answered. "You said you and Hymes did some pretty wild things. What could be wilder than that? Big hat, phony beard, and gloves—who could tell all that stuff was covering one of the hottest little numbers on the south side?"

The smile got a little larger. "Yeah, that was me all right. It was Ollie's idea, and it worked real fine."

He sat on the side of the bed and took her hand. It felt awfully small and fragile to him. "Hymes was killed for the bank-job money, Bess. You've known that all along." She tried to pull away from him but he held her firm. "You've had it stashed all this time, waiting for him to get out. Sam said Hymes was coming by this morning to ask him a favor. Hymes knew the Feds were watching him. Nine to five he was going to ask Sam to pick up the bank loot."

She had stopped pulling away from him and was looking at him more somberly now.

"Hymes shook the Feds before going over to Sam's. So whoever killed him didn't follow him but was waiting in Sam's hallway for him when he got there. Vern, how did Hymes get it?"

".32, close."

"Do you own a .32, Bess?"

Tears filled her eyes. "No, Bull—it can't be."

"Can you figure it any other way, Bess? Who else besides you and Hymes knew why he was going to see Sam this morning?"

Her thin lips began to tremble, repeating "No" softly, and then, "Carol, why?"

It was as though Carol was pinned to the bureau, her back hard against it. Her deep breaths seemed to shake her whole body and her face gleamed with sweat. "Why?" she shouted. "Why? Because I threw my life away nursing you, and all the time you had that money tucked nicely away for him. I heard you two talking, making plans. But what about me? What about *me*?"

Sam dug into his bank account and popped for a seven-course meal at Angelo's for Bull and Chet. Bull went through the motions of celebrating, but he really wasn't enjoying himself. He couldn't shake the thought of Bess and Carol Warren.

The money had been kept in a storage locker on the north side. The Feds were happy as hell to get it back, and considering Bess's health and age they weren't going to be looking for any jail time. But Carol was doing her first night down at central lockup and the Red Cross had relocated Bess to a nursing home.

Did either of them deserve anything better? Probably not. But somehow he would've rather it had been Summers or Tucker who offed Hymes than the way it turned out.

It was by pure chance that Grayner had observed the murder . . .



Grayner hadn't any idea how to decorate an old house. But he had bought a very old house as an investment in Sycamore Groves, a quaint little area not far from the city limits.

It was now nearly impossible to duplicate the ornate scrollwork, beamed ceilings, wide porches, and thick walls of these turn-of-the-century houses without the cost being something only an Arab oil sheik could afford. That was why Evers, Grayner's financial counselor, had advised

him to buy here rather than rent in the city. If a man had to pay an exorbitant amount each month just for a place to live, he might as well have an arrangement whereby he got at least some of that money back.

So Grayner had purchased a white-frame two-story home on the corner of Maple and Fairland. Though structurally sound, the house was in need of refurbishing and a woman's touch. But Grayner had finally gotten his divorce the previous year, and he was unattached. As he drove his Ford compact along Maple Street he grunted. The home he'd bought would hardly fit anyone's concept of a bachelor pad.

He turned the compact left onto Fillmore Avenue and continued toward the Thrifty Mart grocery store in Sycamore Groves' small shopping area. Fillmore was a wide but at that moment deserted street, lined with homes similar to Grayner's, only larger. Each house sat on a slight rise well back from the street. It was evening, and there were lights glowing behind elaborate lead-framed windows.

Some of the windows were wide and scantily draped, and as he passed a looming dark-frame structure Grayner noticed fancy green wallpaper and a glittering crystal chandelier. Maybe that was what was wrong with his dining room: plain beige paint on the walls, and the chandelier was one of those spindly old converted gas fixtures.

Grayner slowed the compact and began checking the windows of each house as he passed. One living room had a gold-framed mirror above a painted brick fireplace. There was a woman in a dining room the walls of which were adorned with rows of colorful mismatched dinner plates. The wall of another house had been completely covered with what appeared to be old brick. There was a man pointing the straight stem of a smoking pipe at a woman barely visible beyond some sheer lace curtains.

No, not a pipe. A gun!

The woman's body twitched convulsively as she stumbled back out of sight. The man, stocky and dark-haired with a glistening bald spot, stared at the weapon in his hand, then down toward where the woman must lie. Grayner had pulled the car to the curb. He watched as the stocky man stared at a downward angle toward the woman, then out the window.

Grayner's foot jerked from the brake and he drove quickly away, his heart keeping time with the racketing engine. The man hadn't seen him, he was sure. And the tires hadn't squealed as he pulled away from the curb, so he hadn't been heard. He slowed his speed and repeated these assumptions to himself until he was reassured and felt safe.

Reasonably safe.

He continued in a daze to Thrifty Mart, checked out with three large tomatoes, diet beer, and a pound of inflation-priced ground chuck, realizing with some misgivings that he should have gone directly to a telephone and called the police. Suppose the woman hadn't been killed with the first shot?

Then he told himself that even if he had called the police immediately, they wouldn't have arrived at the house on Fillmore Avenue to prevent the man from finishing what he'd started. If murder was what he'd started. Perhaps Grayner's eyes had tricked him, perhaps there was an innocent explanation—the man and woman were merely rehearsing for a play.

The incident had already become fuzzy in Grayner's memory. Yet there was no doubt that he should tell the law about what he'd witnessed. He had an obligation. A murder could occur in pastoral Sycamore Groves as easily as anywhere else. By chance, Grayner might have been in the perfect spot at the precise time to witness such a murder. And it was his duty to play the initial role in bringing about justice.

He was feeling excited and rather noble as he returned home and dialed the number of the Sycamore Groves Police Department. A Sergeant Willoughby listened with mild interest to Grayner's story, interrupting now and then in a bored voice to ask him to repeat certain pertinent facts.

"Murder, huh?" Willoughby said when Grayner had finished.

"It could have been."

"What were you doing driving around looking in windows, Mr. Grayner?" The voice was heavy with accusation.

"Why—I was looking for decorating tips."

After a pause Willoughby said, "Don't they sell books on that kinda thing?"

Grayner felt seething anger threaten to boil to the surface. "Listen, I just happened to be driving to the store, wondering how I could decorate this new—this old—this house I just moved into, when it occurred to me I could look into the windows of the houses I was driving past and see what their owners did to the interiors. Is that a crime?"

"You say 323 Fillmore?" the sergeant asked.

"Yes," Grayner said. "It happened about half an hour ago."

"Where were you for the last half hour?" There was faint suspicion in Willoughby's tone.

"I was shopping at Thrifty Mart. They'll remember me there."

"Why didn't you phone us right away?"

"Well, I was sort of in shock, I guess. I needed to be sure of what I saw. I mean, that kind of thing you see but you don't see, if you know what I mean."

"We'll check on this, Mr. Grayner."

Not knowing what else to say, Grayner thanked the sergeant and replaced the receiver. He didn't feel noble now. Civic duty could be trying and thankless. No wonder so many people chose not to become involved.

Grayner turned on the Stravinsky recording on his stereo and switched on his tape recorder. For the last several days he'd been taping library records for his personal collection. The music helped him to forget about his divorce, and now about what he'd seen this evening. Maybe, in the hazy future, he'd have to go to court to testify, but for now he was finished with whatever had or hadn't occurred at 323 Fillmore.

Two evenings later, when Grayner answered a knock on his front door, he was confronted by a stocky, dark-haired man with a bald spot that gleamed in the glow from the porch light.

"Mr. Grayner," the man said, "I'm Roger P. Farrell." He pushed past Grayner into the house.

"I don't believe—" Grayner began. Then he recognized the man.

"I believe," Farrell said, "that you're in a position to cause me a great deal of trouble, Mr. Grayner. Apparently you were driving past my house on Fillmore Avenue and happened to notice my wife and me in our dining room having a spat."

Grayner felt a rush of relief. So nothing violent, nothing gruesome had occurred. He owed Farrell an apology. "Well, a misunderstanding—"

"Just pure chance that anyone would drive by and see me kill Alice," Farrell continued.

Grayner's audible gulp actually hurt his throat.

Farrell lighted a horrible-smelling cigar without asking Grayner's permission. "I noticed your name and address written on a policeman's pad when they came to question me the first time. I remembered seeing a car driving away from the house that night, so I figured what must have happened."

Grayner's vision was wavering. "You mean you're standing there admitting that you actually killed your wife?"

"I am," Farrell said. "Buried her in the park. She broke the yolk of my egg once too often. Besides, she was two-timing me."

"You're insane!" Grayner said in a tone of distressed revelation.

"Used to be. The problem is, now that the police suspect foul play—thanks to you, I might add—it's probably just a matter of days before they find Alice's body under second base."

"Second base?"

"I buried her on the baseball diamond. The ground's always churned up around second base anyway, so nobody'd suspect Alice was there. Of course she's not deep, and before the season's over somebody will slide hard into base and Alice will be found—probably during a double play. But I'll be long gone from Sycamore Groves by then."

"They'll catch you," Grayner groaned. "Don't you realize they'll catch you?"

Farrell's fleshy face took on a considered expression. "They might. There's an element of chance in everything. That's why I'm here."

A coldness expanded in Grayner's stomach. He could hear the raucous music of Rachmaninoff, barely audible from the den of the thick-walled old house. It did nothing to soothe him or make him forget. "I don't understand," he said, sensing that he didn't really want to understand.

"If they ever do find me," Farrell said, "I'll just tell 'em Alice walked out on me and somebody else must have killed her—perhaps someone's hired hit man. But they won't believe me, even though they won't be able to prove anything against me."

And Grayner did understand. He stood listening numbly.

"So they'd come back to you, Mr. Grayner, and maybe be able to build a case, because I took a chance in not pulling the drapes closed in the dining room." Farrell's tiny black eyes brightened with cunning. "But if somebody murdered you the police would have no witnesses."

Panic sprang into Grayner's throat. "They'd know you did it!"

"But they couldn't prove it. Not without witnesses." Farrell walked to the window, smiled, and pulled the drapes closed. Then he drew a revolver from beneath his shirt.

Grayner walked backward on a carpet that suddenly seemed to have become a deep, constraining pudding. Even the air seemed to have thickened to suffocating density as he stumbled into the den. Farrell followed, smiling with approval. The drapes were already closed in the den.

"I was simply driving around," Farrell said, "thinking things over, when I noticed I was on your street. On impulse I stopped at your house. Oh, I knew what I had to do, and there's a knife in the toolbox in the trunk of the car. But a knife!" He shook his head, "Every time I use a knife I cut myself. So I had second thoughts. I drove home and got my gun, the one I used on Alice. This time I'm not acting on impulse. That's the thing that's got me in trouble all my life."

Grayner's breathing was rasping in his ears.

"When I killed Alice," Farrell said, "the only thing that could have gone wrong was a one-in-a-thousand chance, like somebody driving past and just happening at that second to be looking in the window. And darned if that didn't happen." He shook his head in bafflement. "Some days the finger of fate likes to flick us around, Mr. Grayner." He squeezed the trigger.

The pain that erupted in Grayner's chest sent fiery tendrils throughout his body. He was on the floor, watching the ceiling slowly rotate, the globe light fixture above orbiting like a displaced and sterile planet. From a corner of his vision he saw Farrell leave, hurrying away in organized fashion like a salesman late for his next appointment.

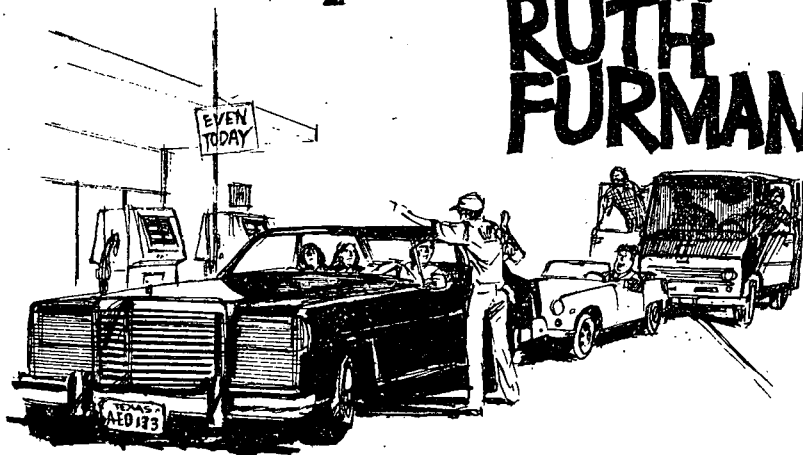
Now he was alone with impending darkness and the vibrant music blaring from the stereo speakers. He had spent a lot of money on his stereo equipment and he knew that the sensitive recorder taping the rousing Rachmaninoff concerto had picked up every sound in the room. Even if there was some confusing overlap, tape experts would easily be able to filter individual sounds and bring out everything they needed on the tape. Every incriminating word.

Farrell had carefully considered sight this time, but not sound. Far below the level of his pain, Grayner experienced a strange serenity as he died to the crash of cymbals.

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They planned the bank robbery like a military operation . . .

THE ODDS ARE EVEN by MARY RUTH FURMAN



“Robbing banks ain’t as easy as it looks on TV,” Bobby complained.

Little Ed nodded in gloomy agreement. Neither of them looked at the General because he was mad at them. It seemed like an easy enough operation and the hardware was no sweat: just guns, stocking masks, a grocery sack to hold the loot, and a stolen car for the getaway. They figured they could also grab a hostage if the cops got too close. Real simple—yet they had come up empty on the last three jobs. As a matter

of fact, they hadn't ever gotten through the front door of a bank.

"We're going to get it right this time. Understand me, soldier?" The General got up from the floor, where a map was nailed down with carpet tacks, to glare at Little Ed. He wasn't really a general, but he thought bank robberies ought to be conducted like military operations, the way he'd seen it done on TV shows.

Little Ed flushed. "That was an awful nice car I took last time."

"Sure." The General's tone was unnecessarily sarcastic. "A great set of wheels. Motor ran like a dream, new tires, air-conditioning, tape deck, power-steering, power-windows—all kinds of power, plus crushed-velvet upholstery. Only one little problem. The damned gas tank was sitting on Empty."

"I ain't the only one who messed up," Little Ed defended himself. "How about Tuesday, for instance?"

The General turned his glare on Bobby. "No guts," he agreed.

Their first attempt had been on Tuesday. Monday didn't count, because they'd only cased the bank. On the way to the robbery, Bobby had lit a cigarette to steady his nerves, smoking through his stocking mask. Somehow a hot ash had flown up and started a run. By the time they got to the bank his nose was poking clear through a ladder of nylon threads. Little Ed couldn't stop laughing, and Bobby refused to get out of the car.

Wednesday it rained, a real gully washer, like when six inches come down in five minutes. Little Ed and Bobby wanted to give it up or at least wait an hour. "Wet streets are dangerous," Little Ed told the General. "If we have to make a fast getaway, we could end up pasted against a light pole." The General said it wouldn't be any more dangerous for them than for the cops. Little Ed wasn't worrying about the cops—after all, they were paid to take chances—but the General wouldn't listen.

When they got to the bank, they had another problem. The General had gotten the biggest gun he could find, and it kept slipping through his waistband. "The bigger the gun," he insisted, "the scarer the hold-ups." The second time the gun slid out his pant leg he thrust it into the grocery bag.

Little Ed kept his foot on the gas pedal, nursing a rough idle in case there was trouble, while the other two made a wild dash through the rain. Just as the General got up to the door the wet paper bag broke and the gun clattered down on the sidewalk.

Bobby turned and made a run for the car. The General hollered "Come back here!" but Bobby just ran faster and the General had to retreat. On the way back to where their own car was stashed, he kept muttering about flagrant insubordination and desertion in the face of the enemy.

Yesterday, Thursday, was the worst. Six blocks from the bank the car Little Ed had stolen sputtered on gas fumes and died of starvation. The General cussed a spell but he was not the kind to give up easy. He made them push the car into a filling-station line that stretched three-quarters of a block. There they waited, shoving the car up a length at a time in hundred-and-five-degree heat.

When they reached the pump, Little Ed was so wrung out he would have collapsed except he was too worried. Any second he expected some cop to spot the stolen car. A person never could tell when one of them might decide to spice up the hour with something besides traffic tickets.

"Fill 'er up," the General ordered.

Little Ed admired how calm and collected the General was until he noticed a sadistic gleam in the attendant's eyes and went back to worrying.

"I expect you'd like the windshield wiped and the spare tire checked. While I'm at it, I could vacuum the floor mats and empty the ashtrays." The man wiped sweat from his face with an oily rag. "Hell, Mister, where you been?"

The General rankled at his tone. The boys could see he was doing a slow burn and ordinarily would have clobbered the guy. Fortunately, the General remembered that he had more important things to do.

"Just fill it, like I said. Unleaded."

"Well, I am just real sorry, Mister." His grin made the words a lie. "But you're odd and today is even. As the Governor said—odds on odd and evens on even. Now, if you'll just push that junk heap out of the way so I can wait on my legitimate customers—"

The General might have killed him then and there, Little Ed reflected, but half of Dallas County was leaning on their horns protesting the delay and several husky beardedos from a van two cars back converged on the stolen car and gave it a shove. The next car moved up to the pumps and there was no way to get back in line.

By then the temperature was a hundred and nine, and if it had been up to Little Ed they'd have ditched the car on the spot, but the General insisted they push it to a shopping center so all the people who'd seen them might forget what they looked like before the car was found.

That was yesterday, a very bad day—and tomorrow the banks would be closed. If they were going to get that bank robbed it would have to be today.

"This time we're going to do it right," the General repeated. "Just like in the military. Map, synchronized watches, strategy, all that kind of stuff. You hear me, soldier?"

Both Little Ed and Bobby nodded and squatted on the floor beside an old Humble Oil Company map of Dallas. Bobby's stubby fingers combed through his sun-bleached hair as he looked at it. Then he gave the General a pained look, his pale blue eyes narrowing with disbelief.

"Hell, General. That old thing don't even have the LBJ Freeway on it."

"Don't make no difference." The General's voice was firm and commanding. "We ain't gonna use the LBJ anyhow." He pointed to an "X" on the map with the busted billiard cue he used as his swagger stick. "We're going to hit this here bank at thirteen hundred hours."

Little Ed nodded. He had watched enough old war movies to know the General meant one o'clock.

"Thirteen is unlucky," Bobby argued. "Couldn't we go at eleven—or what's wrong with two o'clock? They'd probably have more money."

The General glared at Bobby. "I'm getting pretty tired of your insubordination, soldier. We go in at thirteen hundred. I got my reasons. This time we don't make no mistakes like we did before. I got one of them department-store shopping bags, plastic so it don't come apart, and we got ski masks instead of ladies' stockings, so that's all taken care of. What we have to do next is steal another car." The General's dark beady eyes drilled into Little Ed. "Do I got to tell you to make sure it has gas?"

Little Ed shook his head, being meek and as obedient as he could.

"So, O.K." The General's stick skipped across the surface of the map to a spot marked "Y." "I want you to have the car here by 0930 or ten hundred—no later. It's a supermarket parking lot. We switch license plates with something that looks a lot like our new wheels, so's if the cops spot the car and run it we come up clean. You got that?"

Bobby grunted and Little Ed tried looking intelligent.

"Next we go to position 'Z.'" His stick wavered uncertainly as he squinted at the map.

"It's over there where the big North Park Shopping Mall is now," Bobby pointed helpfully.

"Right," the General boomed. "Just testing to see if you was paying attention. We stash our own car at North Park and pick up an extra set of plates."

"Why do we need all them license plates?" Bobby asked.

"I'll get to that. Stop interrupting when I'm giving you your orders, soldier."

Bobby gave him a salute that twisted down with his thumb against his nose.

"I got this planned down to the last detail," the General continued, ignoring Bobby's latest mutiny. "Includin' the smartest getaway anybody ever did. It'll be a classic."

"Yeah, yeah," Bobby said. "Only if it don't work this time I'm going in for something easy, like stealing plans for the latest nuke warhead out of a Pentagon wastebasket, or from the files of one of them newspapers."

The General snorted and made Bobby repeat every move he was supposed to make inside the bank until he could recite it without taking a breath.

"That brings us to the getaway," the General said, beaming with pride. "There's a filling station four blocks away. I checked, and they start pumping gas the same time we're going to hit the bank. What we do is pull into the first alley, which is back of two stores, with no windows for people to snoop. There we'll switch license plates again. That way if somebody happens to take down the numbers of the first set at the bank—and I hope they do—the cops'll be looking for some other car. Meanwhile we go on up and get in line for gasoline just like we been there all morning, see? In a couple of minutes, half a dozen cars will pull in behind us, bumper-to-bumper like, and the cops won't give us a second look. By the time we get up to the pumps, those police cars will be clear to Waxahachie."

Little Ed gaped at the General, admiration mixing with the amazement on his face.

Bobby wasn't nearly so impressed.

"On TV the bank robbers always get away from the scene of the crime as fast as they can," he objected.

The General was scornful. "I seen that too. But if you'll remember, the cops are always chasing right in behind them with their sirens on and lights flashing, the crooks run themselves into a roadblock, and the rest is commercials."

With a dramatic jerk, the General raised his left wrist in front of his nose and watched the second hand sweep around the dial for several minutes. "Now, men, synchronize your watches. I'll count down from ten and when I get to zero it will be 0800 hours. Ten . . . nine . . . eight . . ."

Little Ed shook his watch to make sure it was running and pulled out the stem, turning the big hand forward two minutes.

" . . . three . . . two . . . one. Blast off!"

"You were going to say zero," Bobby reminded him.

"It don't matter none, Bobby," Little Ed assured him, anxious to get going so he would have plenty of time to find the right car. "I got the time. Let's start cruisin' for those wheels."

An hour and a half later, Little Ed pulled into position "Y," the supermarket parking lot. He noted with satisfaction that the fuel gauge still registered two needles above the full mark. This time the General wasn't going to be able to find one thing wrong with the car.

Bobby parked beside him and the General disappeared with his shopping bag.

Minutes later he reappeared. "I got the plates," he whispered loudly. "You guys shield me while I make the switch."

They were running well ahead of schedule when they got to North Park Mall. "All right, Bobby—you steal the other plates," the General ordered. "And, damn it, make sure they're odd. This is an odd day, remember—we don't want no hassle when we get up to the gas pump."

"Right, General," Bobby said.

He was back by a quarter after ten with the plates. "What we going to do until one o'clock, General?" he wanted to know. "Sit in a car that's all kinds of hot?"

The General looked momentarily confused. "Well—uh—that's part of the strategy. We separate and shop around like we don't know each other. I'll go to a radio shop and get them to show me one of those jobs with the police bands so we can reconnoiter the enemy. Then we meet back here at twelve thirty-five hundred hours on the dot." He got out and sauntered casually toward the entrance of the shopping mall.

Bobby looked at Little Ed. "I suppose it's too early for a beer."

"I don't think the General would like us drinking on the job." Little

Ed slid out of the car. "See you around."

Little Ed had shopped with Bobby before and always lost him by the second aisle—but this time, when they were trying to avoid each other, every store he went into Bobby was the first guy he saw. Finally they settled down together and had some enchiladas with draft beer to wash it down. "After all," Bobby pointed out, "we ain't robbed the bank yet."

When they got back to the car, the General was waiting impatiently. "It is twelve thirty-eight hundred hours," he grumbled.

"No sweat," Bobby said, ignoring the perspiration dripping from the General's chin. "We'll make it in plenty of time."

The bank job went down smoother than anything they'd seen on TV. They skinned off their ski masks and threw them in the back seat with the loot as Little Ed turned into the alley. There Bobby and the General switched plates and they were pulling into line for gas before they heard the first siren.

As two police cars whipped by with their rhythmic hoots, the General slapped Bobby and Little Ed on their backs. "What'd I tell you?" he crowed exuberantly. "Strategy! They never gave us a second glance."

By then they were sandwiched in, the car behind practically crawling over their rear bumper and three more back of that. As the minutes crept by and police cars continued to scream past them, Little Ed began to worry. Being trapped in a long line of cars, all sitting on empty and forcing every inch of progress, didn't seem quite as brilliant as it had earlier.

"How much did we get?" he asked, trying to distract his thoughts from the idea that BANK ROBBER was printed on his forehead and any second someone was going to point at him, yelling for the cops.

"I didn't take the time to count," the General drawled. "Do you think we should drag it out and let everybody get a peek?"

"No!" Little Ed's legs started to shake and he was having trouble holding his foot steady on the brake. The car ahead moved up and the car behind honked. He jerked, his foot slipped off the brake onto the accelerator, and the car jumped like a rabbit. He managed to get his foot back on the brake just in time to avoid hooking bumpers and the car rocked alarmingly before hunkering down on its shocks.

"Blast it!" Bobby yelled. "All we need is to hit somebody with cops all over the place! Can't you be more careful?"

The more Little Ed tried to control the twitching in his leg muscles,

the more he shook. The General told him to put it in Park so they could switch drivers, and took over the wheel himself.

When they got to the pumps, the gas jockey said, "Fill it up?"

The General nodded.

"Say, ain't you the guys who come in for gas yesterday? The ones with the wrong number on your tags?"

The General looked up, opened and then closed his mouth, unable to find anything to say.

"But you don't work here," Little Ed managed to protest. "You work down the street."

The guy nodded. "Work there mornings, here afternoons. None of these stations got enough gas to pump all day. But it's O.K. You got the right kind of number on your plates today. Different car though."

The General found his voice. "Just fill it up! Unleaded, like before."
"Sure, fella."

Whistling cheerfully, he pulled off the gas cap, stuck in the nozzle, and started the pump. Then he walked back. "I guess I was pretty hard on you guys yesterday. We have to take a lot of bull, you know—people hollering about phony shortages and stuff. Hell, we can't do nothin' about it, and sometimes my temper gets a little short. Just to show there's no hard feelings I'll check under the hood and wash your windshield."

Before the General could assure him he didn't expect any special treatment, the attendant was raising the hood. Just then the pump cut off and the guy's head came up like he'd been shot.

"What the hell!" he yelled. "That's less than three bucks, Mister! You think this is some kind of game? There's a six-dollar minimum. All them other cars sittin' on Empty and you take up space in the line!" His shout reached a full block. "These guys—first they come in odd when they're supposed to be even, next they top off their tank when it ain't a quarter empty! It's guys like them that cause all the trouble!"

Little Ed looked back at the mob forming behind them and wondered where the little old lady with the silvery blue hair had found the rope she was knotting into a noose.

"Let's get out of here," he pleaded, but it was too late. A police car pulled in, blocking them at the pump.

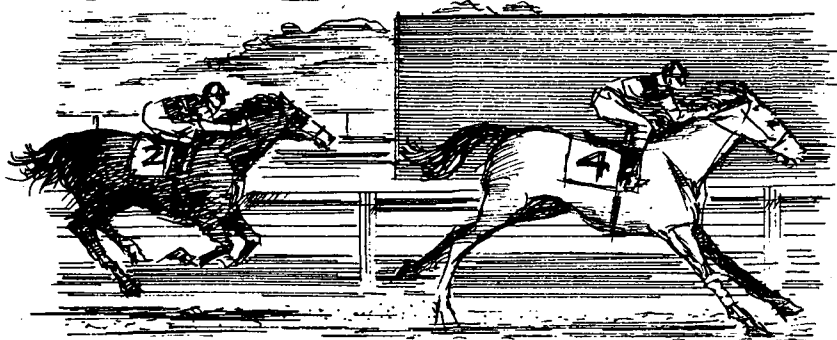
"You got a violator?"

"That's right, Officer," the pump jockey said. "Second-time offense, no less."

Everyone in the racing world hated Stu Gallon . . .



SILVER SPECTRE



by **JON L. BREEN**

Want to hear a ghost story? Come on, listen to this. The next drink's on me. You don't like ghost stories? Well, call it a detective story then, with yours truly as detective. I can't prove I was a detective, but then nobody can prove there was a ghost either. You don't like detective stories? Well, it's also a racing story—and I know you like racing, because you have today's program from Santa Anita sticking out of your jacket pocket. Pretty good, huh? I told you I was a detective.

I heard this story years ago, in a bar. It wasn't a sleazy joint like this one though. It was much cozier, sort of like a friendly English pub. It was back East, in a place called Blakemore Village, an Atlantic resort town. It doesn't exist any more—it hardly existed then. But there was a racetrack there, Blakemore Downs. It went bankrupt about the time racing was booming all over the country. The whole operation was snake-bit from the first, they say, though it managed to stay in business quite a few years. At the time I got to Blakemore Village, the wrecking ball was only a week or two away from that pretty grandstand. The track had been closed for a couple of years. My paper had assigned me to do a piece on the track—a nostalgia piece, they'd call it today.

I wasn't too thrilled with the assignment, but I always tried to do my best. In the middle of the day I went out and looked at the track. I talked to the caretaker, the only human being on the premises, an old ex-jockey named Billy Duff. He rode around the grounds on an aged grey gelding, the only horse left at a place where so many crashing hooves had thudded their way to glory or disaster. You can laugh all you want, but sportswriters had to write that way in the old days.

It turned out that nearly everything at the track was still intact. Even the jockey room had racks and racks of bright-colored silks hanging there. Everything was a little dusty and the infield was overgrown with weeds, but you had the idea they could have started racing tomorrow if there'd been any horses to race or any suckers to watch them. No offense, friend. I'm sure you're a scientific bettor and regularly show a profit on your investments. But I'm sure you'll agree that most of your brethren lack whatever sense they were born with.

I got what I could from Duff, but he was a closemouthed old timer without many stories to tell, and it began to look as if I'd be writing a dull piece. Over the forty years of Blakemore Downs' existence, some really fine horses had run there. But I wanted to turn in something more than just a walk through the old newspaper files and racing manuals.

That night I went into the local tavern, sat down at the bar, and ordered a drink. In those days, I did that for information, for color, not just because I wanted to drink away the evening. Now I don't have that excuse, but back then when I walked up to a bar I was working.

There were a few regulars sitting there shooting the breeze, and they were cordial to me. By that time in the history of Blakemore Village they

weren't seeing many visitors and much of the conversation was devoted to figuring out why their town was dying. They were philosophical enough about it. Just one of those things—boom today, bomb tomorrow.

At a corner table, away from anyone else, was a gaunt and gloomy-faced man of about sixty. He didn't join in the conversation, but devoted himself to serious drinking. The bartender would provide him with a fresh drink periodically in response to some practically invisible signal, and the other regulars would cast a voyeuristic glance his way every so often.

Promptly at eight o'clock, Billy Duff came in for what was apparently a nightly quick one, something you could set your clock by. He was friendly enough but no more talkative than he had been with me that day at the track. He too cast an interested glance at the man at the corner table. Obviously, he knew him but he made no move to go over and say hello. I offered to buy Billy a drink but he assured me that one was his permanent limit, and he left at a quarter past eight.

I hung on, chatting with the regulars. I was enjoying the conviviality and had a hunch that if the man at the corner table ever got up and left the tavern an interesting story might come my way. It might or might not have any bearing on my story about Blakemore Downs—but by that time I didn't much care.

Sure enough, about ten o'clock, the man at the corner table lurched to his feet, made his way to the bar with wobbly dignity, wordlessly paid his tab, and made his way out the door.

As soon as he was out of earshot the bartender said, "Old Stu. I haven't seen him around here in years."

The other regulars nodded or grunted in uninformative agreement.

Finally I had to ask. "Who is he?"

"Stuart Gallon. He used to be a trainer of racehorses. He led the trainer standings at the Downs for years."

"He must be sorry to see the place torn down," I remarked.

One of the regulars snickered. "I don't know," he said.

I smiled. "Come on, you guys. There's a story to tell about this guy. So tell it."

"You may not be able to use it. It's sort of a ghost story," said the bartender.

I shrugged. "I don't believe in ghosts—but some of my readers might."

"O.K." The bartender looked over my shoulder toward the window

with a slight smile. "Fog's rollin' in," he said. "Sometimes it gets so thick here you can't see your hand in front of your face."

"Save the atmosphere," I kidded. "Don't try to scare me. Just tell me the story, and I'll provide the whistling wind or the cold chill or whatever's called for when I write it up. And—" I added as an afterthought "—set up a round on me." I didn't want to lose the story, whatever it was.

"We do get a lot of fog here though," the bartender said. "It's one of the things that didn't do the Downs any good. Sometimes it would be so foggy in the afternoon they couldn't even do a full chart of the race. It'd just say 'fog' and give the positions at the finish. Along the backstretch, the jockeys could have been wrestling or shooting pool or kissing each other and nobody in the stands'd know it.

"But that's getting away from the story. Not too far though. The man who just left, Stu Gallon, was not well liked in these parts. Whether it was justified or not, I don't know."

"It was justified all right!" snapped one of the regulars, a smallish old man with leathery skin. Another ex-jockey? I wondered.

"I know you think so, Fred. All I know about it of my own knowledge is that he believed in racing his horses a lot. He thought a race wasn't much harder on a horse than a workout—and he might as well go for the money as just run 'em around the track for no reason. Some folks said that was inhumane, but I don't know."

Fred said heatedly, "It wasn't just that, Charley. A lot of good trainers believed in racing their horses a lot. But Stu Gallon was a hard man. He hated horses—that's the long and short of it. He'd race them when they weren't right and he'd take a whip to them if they looked cross-eyed at him. And he didn't treat people much better. I'd have gone over and punched him one tonight when he came in, but I guess he's been punished plenty already for what he did."

"Anyway," said Charley, the bartender, "for purposes of the story let's just say Stu Gallon was not a popular man around the racetrack. People who worked for him never seemed to stay long. But he was a successful trainer.

"Now about the best horse Stu Gallon ever trained was a grey stallion named Silver Spectre. Ever heard of him?"

I shook my head. And I knew most of the good horses in those days.

"It was thirty or more years ago, of course, and the Spectre never got to show what he could really do. But he was a good one—right, Fred?"

Fred nodded solemnly. "He could have been a great one. He was a beautiful thing too. His coat was nearly white, and that was a time when grey horses were a novelty on American tracks. I remember folks used to say that grey horses were bad luck, but I never bought that."

The bartender, who had established himself through the evening as the best raconteur of the group, took up the story again. "Well; Silver Spectre became a real favorite of the track patrons, for his style as much as for his color. He won four straight races at the Downs that year, beating a tougher field each time he went to the post. And every single time he'd enter the first turn at the rear of the field, and on the backstretch he'd sometimes be fifteen or twenty lengths behind the leader, but on the far turn he'd suddenly start to get himself in gear and make his move. As they turned into the stretch he'd be picking up his opposition one by one, and by the finish line he'd have his grey neck in front one way or another. He was a real crowd pleaser, I can tell you. I won some money on him in my day."

Fred allowed a suggestion of a smile to crease his grim face. "You were lucky, Charley. I just ate his dust."

"Well, came the week of the Blakemore Handicap—that was a real big race in those days. Horses used to ship in for it from all over the East. One year Equipoise was supposed to come—"

"And another year," Fred added, "Seabiscuit was supposed to come." I laughed. "But who did come?"

"A lot of big horses came," said Fred. "It really was a big race."

"Sure it was," I said. "I remember."

They seemed mollified. Charley went on. "Well, this particular year everybody was talking about Silver Spectre and whether he was good enough to challenge the great field that would be going to the post that Saturday. He'd beaten the best horses stabled on the grounds, but he hadn't yet faced any horses as good as some of the ones shipping in. I remember on Tuesday of that week there was a rumor going around that he had hurt himself in his stall and it was doubtful Stu Gallon would run him. All week it was touch and go. But on Saturday, sure enough, his name turned up in the entries.

"Well, the weather that day was typical of the kind of luck that dogged the Downs all the years it was in business—"

"Dogged this whole town, in fact," another of the regulars amended.

"That's right. The fog rolled in. The folks in the grandstand—I wasn't

there, I had to work the bar that day—could only see the stretch-run. Beyond the turns, around the backside, you couldn't see a thing. All in all it was a crummy day to have to run the Blakemore Handicap, but they had a big crowd just the same. And sure enough, when the bugler played 'Boots and Saddles,' there was Silver Spectre going to the post with Ike McCann on his back."

Fred tilted his glass in a suggestion of a toast. "A great rider," he said.

"Some of the folks that were there that day swear that Silver Spectre looked lame in the post parade."

"If it were now," Fred put in, "the vet would have scratched him on the spot. They weren't as careful in them days."

"Did you think he looked lame?" I asked Fred.

"I wasn't there—I had a mount in New York that day. I'm glad I missed it."

I looked around at the other regulars. "Were any of you there?"

None of them had been. I sighed. This was a second- or third-hand story I was getting. And when was the ghost coming into it?

"I've seen pictures," said Charley. "And I know from the pictures that he had one foreleg wrapped going to the post—the right, I think. And we all know that any kind of front bandage makes a bettor wary. But to have just one leg bandaged! You might as well hang a sign reading UN-SOUND around the horse's neck."

"It was a big field for the race—fifteen. They started from behind the webbing—that was before the days of the starting gate, you know. It was a mile-and-a-quarter race, so they went all the way down the homestretch once, in front of the crowd, then all the way around again. Silver Spectre broke with his field, but as usual he dropped quickly to the rear of the pack. He looked to be running O.K. though, and his fans were yelling encouragement to him and Ike McCann as the field passed the stands. If anything, the Spectre was closer to the pace than usual, even though all fourteen others had him beat going to the turn. Then the field swept past the clubhouse and out of sight into the fog."

Charley paused a beat for emphasis, then gave me the next bit dramatically.

"My friend, fifteen horses entered that fog, and only fourteen returned. It was much later before most of the spectators were to learn that Silver Spectre had gone down on the backstretch, his right foreleg broken. The vet put him down on the spot. What was worse, Ike McCann had fallen

on his head, and after a couple of days in a coma he was dead too.”

“It was a terrible tragedy,” said Fred. “They buried Silver Spectre in the infield at the Downs. Ike’s family had him buried in a regular cemetery but, knowing him, I think he’d have liked to be buried alongside the Spectre. He loved that horse.”

“And he hated Gallon,” said Charley.

“Surê. The two emotions went together.”

“Everybody figured Gallon ran the horse when he shouldn’t have,” said Charley.

“And everybody was right,” said Fred. “He did.”

“Up to then, Stu Gallon was unpopular only with people who knew him. Now he was hated by a world of horse lovers who had never met him. Stu Gallon had become the most despised man on the American turf.”

A touch of hyperbole there, I thought. I’d never even heard of Stu Gallon until that evening.

“For a while at least,” Charley went on, “it didn’t seem to make that much difference to Gallon’s career. As I say, he was a good trainer, nasty as he was, and his horses won their share of purses. But then things started to go bad for Stu Gallon. We ought to tell you about a certain morning in October, some thirty years back. It was during the morning training period out at the Downs, and it was pea-soup foggy. You were there, weren’t you, Fred?”

The ex-rider nodded his head. “Yeah, I can give you this part first hand. It was a terrible morning, but the business of training horses went on as usual. The clockers had to keep a close watch on horses going on and off the track. They didn’t want any expensive pieces of horseflesh running into each other in that treacherous fog. Oh, I guess they didn’t want any of us jockeys getting ourselves killed either, but that wasn’t uppermost.

“I remember I was sitting on a brown two-year-old filly. I don’t remember her name—she wasn’t much. We were at the gap on the backstretch where you could go from the stable area onto the track to work out. The ground crew had been renovating the track, so no one had been allowed to go out for several minutes. The filly’s trainer and I were about to take her onto the track—the chief clocker had given us the nod—when all of a sudden this big grey stallion comes charging out of the fog, hell bent for leather. He was hugging the rail, and the boy on his back was

pumping him for all he was worth. As he streaked past us, the chief clocker was sputtering about how he hadn't let any horse on the track and where the hell had the grey come from. He told his outrider to go after the horse and rider, but the outrider, who'd turned downright pale, said to him, 'Not me, boss. I ain't chasin' no ghosts.'

"'Ghosts!' the clocker roared at him.

"'Yeah, ghosts,' he said. 'You can laugh at me if you want, but that was Silver Spectre, with Ike McCann on his back.'

"We did laugh at him, but not for long. Because nobody ever found that grey horse or his rider. The only other interval on the track is on the front side where the horses come out in the afternoon, and there was a maintenance man working there who said no horse went through that interval all morning. So, as far as anybody could tell, that horse and rider didn't ever exist at all except along the backstretch rail from out of the soup and back into it.

"And it was that same morning that Stuart Gallon's little girl was drowned."

"Somebody drowned his daughter?" I asked.

"No, no, it was an accident," said Charley. "Hell—nobody, no matter how much they hated Stu, could have wanted a terrible thing like that to happen. It happened in the swimming pool at Gallon's hotel. It was a sad thing. The death of a child always is. And Stu Gallon was really devoted to her, too. Nobody's all rotten, I guess. Gallon was only mostly rotten."

"Did you ever see the ghost again, Fred?" I asked.

"No, not me."

"He *was* seen again though," Charley said. "Several times. Always on foggy mornings. People I know have seen him—people who used to come in here."

I looked around at the gathered regulars. Again, no witnesses.

I think Charley sensed I was losing interest. He leaned across the bar and looked me in the eye. "And every time that grey phantom made his appearance something else terrible happened to Stu Gallon, as if Ike and the Spectre were getting their revenge from beyond the grave. The second time the ghost horse ran Stu Gallon's wife died. The very same day. Then his house burned down. Then he lost his job with Lakehills Stable and really went on the skids."

"I was surprised to see him in here tonight," said Fred.

"Yeah. He hasn't been in here in years."

I had a feeling I'd had enough for the evening, enough to drink and enough ghost story. Not that they'd scared me—I wondered if they were making it all up. As I swayed to my feet I asked Fred, "After all the terrible things that happened to him, did most people come to forgive him for the things he did in his earlier days?"

"Well, I never heard that his misfortunes made Stu Gallon any nicer. And some of the things he did back when I knew him are the kind of things you just don't forgive."

I said good night to the assembly, paid my bill, and made my way carefully through the fog back to Blakemore Village's last remaining excuse for a hotel. There I saw the former trainer, Stu Gallon, sitting in the lobby, just staring into space. He did seem to have an oddly haunted look in his eyes.

I have to confess, though, I slept well that night. No nightmares. And if I had had one, it probably would have been about confronting my editor without a good story.

I slept late into the morning, as is my custom. When I was out on the street at eleven, the fog had cleared and it was a bright, sunny day. I was debating whether to try to gather more material for my article or just go back to the city and do my best with what little I had. As I passed the tavern, Charley was just opening up. "You keep long hours," I said.

"It's my place and there's not enough business to hire anybody to help pour. You heard what happened at Blakemore Downs this morning?"

"No. Something happened and I missed it?"

"The town cop came by a few minutes ago and told me. Stu Gallon is dead. They found him out at the Downs. In the infield."

"What was he doing there?"

"The guys that found him are from the wrecking company that's going to tear the place down next week. They said he was lying on the grave of Silver Spectre. They say he had a shovel. It seems he was digging."

I must say that gave me more of a shiver, there in the bright sunlight, than anything I'd heard in the foggy, theatrical gloom of the night before.

"You know what I think?" said Charley. "I think Silver Spectre and Ike McCann made one last appearance this morning."

And as I've thought about it over the years I think that's what happened too—in a manner of speaking.

Stuart Gallon died of a heart attack, they found. And it could have been brought on by the strain of his crazy digging. Or he could have been frightened to death by something he saw.

A ghost horse and rider coming at him out of the fog? Maybe.

But I thought of that old ex-jockey, Billy Duff, who took care of the place. And I thought of his old grey gelding, the only horse on the grounds. And I thought of that jockey room with the silks still hanging there ready to wear, surely including the silks worn by Ike McCann when he rode Silver Spectre. And I wondered if what scared Stu Gallon to death might not have been a flesh-and-blood man streaking out of the fog on a flesh-and-blood horse, participating in a quite deliberately deadly masquerade. It could have been an act of durable, burning hatred. Or it could have been an act of mercy.

Or it could have been a ghost.

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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.

V. C. Stabile
Vice President and Treasurer

It was the third time that day Phil Perkins had killed his wife

HOW DO I KILL THEE?



by
ERNEST SAVAGE

Phil Perkins was driving down Main Street ten minutes from home when his wife stepped off the curb in front of his car. He hit her square and hard and her fat body slogged off the upper edge of his windshield, soaring high in the air and coming down into the grille-work of the monstrous truck he could see in his rearview mirror, ricocheting like a rag doll and disappearing into the stream of opposing traffic—poof!

He drove steadily on, making the light at Seventeenth Street, pro-

HOW DO I KILL THEE?

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ceeding six more blocks to Emerald, his street, and turning left as always. There she was again, in the guise of a boy standing in the gutter, and again she stepped in front of his car and was punched high into the thick greenery of the trees that arched over the street and made it one of the prettiest lower-middle-class streets in town.

It was the third time today he'd killed her, one of his more productive days. He'd been having a lot of productive days lately.

He turned into the drive of his home, parked in front of the garage out back, and walked into the house through the kitchen door with two heavy ledger books under his arm. Phil Perkins was a bookkeeper and a good one, one of the last of a dying breed in this computerized age. But he loved his work and still had as much of it as he could handle. He regarded a ledger sheet as one of the most beautiful printed pages man had yet devised, with its intricate and utterly logical network of intersecting lines. He loved the column headings: Salaries—Taxes—Rent—Utilities—Insurance—Maintenance—Phone. So sensible and concise. He loved the act of entering figures between the colorful vertical lines, felt an artist's need to make them full, round, and important, lusted for the balance that was there to be found, that could elude him only for a while.

He put the books on the kitchen table and washed his hands at the sink, careful not to touch the dirty dishes heaped there. On the counter to his left two frozen Mexican dinners were slowly thawing, and Phil, a neat and orderly man—his tie was always firmly knotted and centered in his collar—lifted them and wiped the puddled water from beneath before drying his hands.

A car glides quietly down the street outside carrying two hell-born kids, one at the wheel, one in the rear seat with a rifle at the ready, its ugly snout drawing beads on windows as they pass—there is a tongue of flame, a pop, the sound of shattering glass, and Thelma is stretched out on the living-room floor, a bullethole between her eyes—poof!

He shook his bony, almost fleshless head. They were coming thick and fast today, his repertory drawing down; but, no—he had dozens of them; hundreds accumulated through the years, his private theater of dark and deadly deeds. Phil Perkins was fifty-four years old and was married to a woman he had first killed on the second night of their honeymoon in the summer of 1949.

Charley Randall, Phil's next-door neighbor, framed in his kitchen window twenty feet away across the drive, cracked a can of beer and raised

it in salute, and Phil, with nothing better in the house to drink—Thelma wouldn't allow it—raised a half glass of water in response. They both smiled vivaciously, as neighbors do between two panes of glass, and both drank, Phil sparingly. Charley was a good neighbor. He kept his place tidy, his lawns green and cut, and his kids—in the old days—quiet and polite. Phil respected quiet and order above all things.

And now, suddenly, sharply, he wanted a drink—a real one—the incident with Charley having stimulated those quiescent glands. But it was a day early—Friday was his day to go up to Sully's Rendezvous and get bombed—so he quelled the desire, a disciplined man.

He picked up his ledgers from the table, walked through the door to the living room where the TV was blasting away as usual, stepped over the body of his wife, a supine lump on the floor, and proceeded to his room, where for the next hour he'd do some work.

His bedroom was his office. Years ago he'd replaced the old double bed with a single to make room for his desk, files, and shelves. Approaching the open door (which should have been closed), he anticipated with an almost sensual pleasure the military neatness of the room, with the boxes of numbered ledger sheets carefully stacked, the brown folders, green folders, accordion folders each in its place, all the paper clips boxed.

He sat down at his desk and began to work, his mind at once absorbed, his carefully rounded figures accumulating in steady meaningful groups. But there was something wrong. He heard the muffled blare of the TV, the thrum of cars passing on the street, sounds normally blocked by his trancelike state. It was five-thirty. He'd been working less than a half hour and his mouth was dry, his need for a drink again suddenly sharp and cruel.

He got up, went into the hall and across the living room, stepped over his wife's body again, and stopped in front of the TV. The news was on, the roving camera panning across the scene of a highway wreck, zooming in on one of the victims—who was Thelma. They were always Thelma: car, plane, or drowning victims, always Thelma.

He turned down the volume, knowing she would turn it up again; it was the only game they still played. He felt a draft of chill evening air, heard the swish of a car speeding by—the front door was ajar, open a foot. He hadn't noticed before. He went over and closed it, went through the front hall door to the kitchen, poured himself a half glass of water, and stared at it a moment before putting it down again.

Thelma lurching up from her chair at the kitchen table, gripping her fat belly, terror in her eyes. Botulism! She stares at the half eaten fish on her plate, falls to the floor, and is gone—poof!

It was getting dark outside. Phil straightened his tie, checked his shirt cuffs for stains, and went out the kitchen door to his car. Charley Randall was watering a bed of flowers along the fence between their yards. He was smiling, as always—a happy man. “Hi, Phil,” he said. “How’s Thelma?”

Phil had his hand on the car door. He said “Eh?”, reconstituted the question from its echoes, and said, “Oh, fine—fine, Charley—thanks.”

He drove back up Emerald to Main Street, turned right without coming to a full stop, drove past a block of shabby storefronts, past the precinct station, and four more nondescript blocks to Sully’s Rendezvous, parking in the nearest open slot.

He paused at the door of the bar, acutely aware of a broken pattern. He should not be here until tomorrow. He was a man of discipline, of principle, and he considered his drinking a disciplined pleasure, the way a pleasure should be, carefully controlled. But it was an inexpensive recreation, he reminded himself, debating the problem, because he always solicited Sully’s business when he went there. He would say as he settled onto one of Sully’s comfortable stools, “Sully, how about letting me do your books?” and Sully would answer, playing the game, that he did his own (“on the back of an envelope”), and the ten-dollar bill that Phil laid on the bar could be called a legitimate business expense.

Sully usually had his first martini ready for him as he settled in and the flow of them was steady after that until he was as drunk as he wanted or needed to be, the catharsis complete once again, the desire for his wife’s death given voice, his fantasies fleshed out before Sully’s eyes, or the eyes (and ears) of the guy next to him at the bar, who usually also wanted to kill *his* wife—or mother, or boss, or kid, or someone. Sully understood that most of his clients were potential murderers (“As who is not?” he would say) and it was best that they get their killing done here instead of at home or the office or plant. So the liver goes eventually, he would say, but that’s better than twenty to life in the pokey, ain’t it?

Phil braced himself and pushed through the door, anticipating and answering Sully’s opening remark: “What the hell—did I lose a day?”

“No, I found one,” he said, sitting down, throat parched until the first nepenthean flow of gin.

The guy on the stool next to his was a stranger—a Thursday man. He began talking at once about the lousy police protection in this town, about the murder yesterday afternoon in broad daylight of a local housewife, the third in the last ten days, some junkie busting in to swipe twenty bucks' worth of something for a fix and knocking off the lady of the house while he's at it. They oughta stand them bastards up against a wall a hundred at a time and shoot 'em. The guy rambled on, airing his own scenes of violence, of vengeance, of retribution.

They'd spent their honeymoon at Yosemite in June of '49, and in those days they had a special evening event there called the "Fire Fall." He didn't know if they still held it and didn't care, but in those days the park people would build a huge bonfire on top of the sheer stone cliff behind the hotel and when the night was good and dark they'd push the entire thing down the two- or three-thousand-foot face of the cliff like a falls, only of fire. He and Thelma had stood there with the others and watched it, her pudgy hand tentatively—like a nervous pet mouse—in his, the disaster of their nuptial night less than twenty-four hours old. As the first tendrils of fire came over the edge of the cliff, he saw her body in amongst the sparks, whole at first, then in parts, aflame, dwindling to fiery ash at the bottom of the cliff, and the mouse in his tightening fist squealed and withdrew itself and never put itself back there again. It was the first time he'd killed her.

"She must be a slob," the man said.

Phil stared at him, puzzled for a moment; so he'd said it aloud, had he? The vision so fixed in his mind all these years had finally been given voice. He'd never told anyone that before. "She put on," he said, "ten pounds the first week we were married."

"Don't worry," the man said, "the heart'll take her out one of these days. Triglycerides in the veins—thick as sludge in a sewer pipe. The heart can't handle that."

But it couldn't have been the heart, not with those popping eyes, and there was no bullethole in her head, and the front window wasn't broken, so she couldn't have been shot from the street. And her neck was bruised, he remembered now, along with the popping eyes.

He drank half the fresh martini Sully'd put before him and wondered: Did I strangle her? Did I ever strangle her in all these years? The man next to him was blathering on, unheard, and Phil thought: No, it was always a *thing* that killed her: a car, poison, a bullet, fire, never my

hands. He studied them, the long clean fingers—artist's hands, they'd been called. And now—killer's hands? I mean *real* killer's hands?

Where was I, he thought, panicky, this afternoon? He'd picked up Fetter's books at two-thirty and then stopped by Dunphy's for his check, and then? He'd gotten home around five—but what about the two hours between Dunphy's and then? He frowned, his mind gone blank for a moment, a chill working up his back. Ah! the stationer's! He'd stopped by the stationer's to order a supply of number ten ledger sheets—or was that yesterday? He felt sweat pop on his brow and saw with his mind's eye, in kleig-lit detail this time, the great mound of her lying there, the doughlike face where once the frightened, pretty girl had lived.

"I myself never married," the guy next to him said, and Phil, as though conducting a dialogue half in silence, thought: Nor should I have. He remembered sharply the mousy little hand in his that night, nearly crushed to mush. And so little touching since then: none, in fact. She'd been afraid; and he—what?—too fastidious, too tidy.

"Otherwise," the guy said, chuckling, "I don't suppose I'd mind if some hophead busted in one day and wiped her out. Most married guys I know—" He rambled on again.

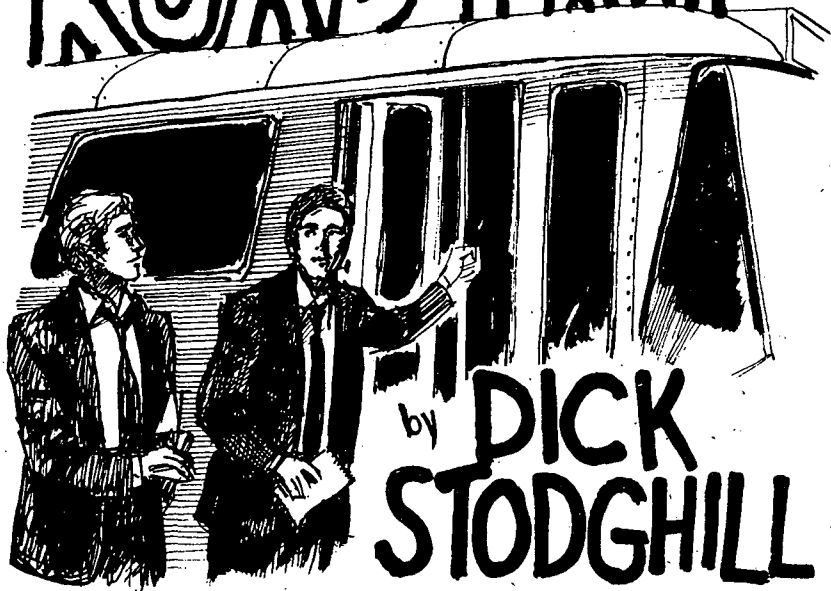
Of course! Phil thought. That's what happened—some junkie broke in—the open door—strangled her, and then ran. Just before he got home. The thought relaxed him for a moment. But having wished her death all these years, he argued with himself, would it be just that someone else obliged him? His orderly mind rejected random chance. You do not balance books that way. But had *he* done it—with these hands—or, having killed her a thousand times, had random chance been his ally on the thousand and first? It needed sorting out, the facts columniated in tidier groups. He pushed money across the bar and ordered another drink.

It was coming clearer, the outline of a decision hovering into view. He would stop by the precinct station and make a statement. He liked that—a statement; like a financial statement, with all the figures neatly tabulated and a balance struck. There must be a balance, he thought, always a balance, between debit and credit. Between good and bad. His book-keeper's heart relaxed. He put more money on the bar. "Buy everybody a drink," he told Sully, "and yourself too."

He would get good and drunk—a final catharsis—and then get on with the books. No balance had ever eluded him yet.

Tony Drake's batting average had plummeted . . .

ROAD TRIP



We flew out of O'Hare on a six o'clock charter and nobody was sorry to say goodbye to Chi after dropping three in a row to the Cubs.

Bill Brophy had buttonholed me before we boarded the bus at Wrigley Field and said, "Let's wait till we get to Cincy to eat, have a late dinner at the Maisonette." It was O.K. with me. They'd serve a meal on the plane, but unless I've got both feet on the ground the only nourishment I want comes out of a bottle.

After we were settled in at the Netherland Hilton I met him in the lobby and we walked the few blocks to the restaurant. We had just started on our salads when Tony Drake, the Stars' third baseman, walked in alone. He nodded but kept going when Brophy waved to him to join us. I wasn't surprised—Drake was a loner.

A few minutes later a silvery blonde with curves in all the right places slinked by our table and I gave her a double take because I had seen her at the Hyatt Regency back in Chicago and again at Wrigley Field. You run across a lot of good-looking women around the league but she wasn't one you'd mistake for somebody else. I rubbernecked and, sure enough, she sat down at Drake's table.

Brophy grinned. "Looks like Tony's been busy since he hit town," he said. I just stared at him because I knew it wasn't that way. There isn't much that surprises me but this did. A woman like that and Tony Drake didn't add up any way you looked at it.

The next morning I was having a late breakfast at the hotel when Drake came in and joined me. He seemed uneasy, preoccupied, but you expect that from someone who hasn't had a hit in more than a week. That starts any ball player, except maybe a few of the really big names, wondering if he might be in line for a ticket to Pawtucket or Columbus, Georgia.

Drake was halfway through his third season in the majors but only his second as a regular. He was a better-than-average gloveman and a steady .275 hitter until recently. Kind of a shy kid out of a small town in Iowa. A pro ball player for six of his twenty-four years but still a little in awe of the big cities, a little naive.

Something was on his mind or he wouldn't have sat down without so much as a nod from me first. Some of the Stars would pull up a chair if you were in conference with the Commissioner himself, but not Drake. I cleaned up my steak and eggs. As he ordered breakfast I pulled my coffee cup closer and lit a cigarette. "Gonna be a warm day," I said.

"Yeah."

"Humid."

"Yeah."

"How's that little gal back in Iowa?" He was engaged to a pink-cheeked, corn-fed hometown girl. She and her parents had taken in a series at St. Louis earlier in the year and Drake had showed her off like a prize heifer.

"She's O.K.," he said, and his face turned two shades redder than the

Stars' caps. "You saw me with that woman last night, didn't you?"

I nodded and watched him over the rim of my cup. He wanted to say more but didn't know how to go about it. He picked at his food when it came and when any ball player does that you know something's wrong. After a while he pushed the plate aside with half his breakfast still on it and we got up and went our own ways.

It was an off-day—Thursday usually is in Cincinnati—but Pat McGann, the Stars' manager, had called an afternoon batting practice. Drake wasn't the only one not hitting and the team average had dipped to a paltry .252, not good for a division contender. Scoring only two runs in three games at Wrigley Field, a hitters' paradise, was even more disturbing. Those three straight losses while the Phillies were winning two out of three had dropped the Stars five games behind. In late July that gets you worrying.

Before the session got started I interviewed McGann and then walked out and stood around the batting cage with the rest of the writers who traveled with the team and one from a Cincinnati paper. I jotted down a few comments I could use. Nothing much, just the usual trite stuff, but a couple were a little funny—the dry kind that some ball players must lie awake nights thinking up.

When it was over I went back to the hotel, wrote a story—off day or not, they expect one—and then banged out about two-thirds of a column for Sunday. That left me with nothing to do until the game the next night. After dinner with Brophy and a couple of the players at Grammer's, a good German restaurant a mile or so north of the hotel, I settled in the lobby with *The Sporting News*.

About nine o'clock Drake got off the elevator, brushed past a couple of Baseball Annies who rushed over when they spotted him, and went down the stairs and out the door. On a hunch I got up and tagged along behind. He walked a couple of blocks and went into a small tavern. I didn't want him to know I was nosing around so I loitered in front of a store across the street.

After maybe fifteen minutes he came out and headed back toward the hotel. I dodged traffic and entered the tavern. Just as I'd expected, there was the blonde at a table, and sitting beside her was a slick-looking character, the kind that makes you check to be sure your wallet's still in your pocket.

I took a stool at the bar, had a beer, and was right on their heels when they left. They walked to another hotel, got separate keys at the desk, and I was waiting for them when they got to the elevators. I eyeballed the room number on her key tab and got his by strolling by as he unlocked his door.

Back in the lobby I studied the bellhops, picked out the most likely prospect, and slipped him a ten. A few minutes later he handed me a card with two names on it. Phony, I figured, but better than nothing.

I went back to my room and tried to piece it together. The setup smelled, I was sure of it. Whatever was going on it was probably the cause of Drake's tailspin at the plate. The woman looked like she wasn't above some kind of a hustle and the smoothie she was with was a con artist if I ever saw one.

The answer wasn't going to come to me without more to go on, I knew that. I picked up the phone and started to dial, but then put it back down. After a few seconds I grabbed it again. What the hell, I smelled an exclusive, and if I was right the newspaper would pick up the tab.

"That you, Marchetti?" I said when a man growled "Yeah?" on the other end of the line. He grunted and it sounded affirmative so I said, "I've got a job I need done right away."

"What're you doing in town? I thought you were on the road with the team."

"I am. I'm calling from Cincy. Now here's what I want you to do—"

I asked him to check out the blonde and her friend without telling him much else. Whatever it was they were up to, I figured they must have started it there at home or they wouldn't have picked on Drake.

"Who's paying for this?" he said when I was through.

"Maybe the paper, maybe me."

He grunted again and told me how tough it would be. I couldn't argue with that but I knew Nick Marchetti was as good a private eye as you'd find anywhere. When he finished crying the blues I said, "Nick, I want you to hang loose for a couple of days. Check the flights to Cincy and be ready to buzz out here in a hurry."

"Cincinnati in July? No way, man."

I chuckled. "It beats Minneapolis in January."

He complained a little more, told me how many big cases he was working on, and finally said O.K., he'd come if I yelled for help. I told him I'd phone him at noon the next day for a report and hung up, grinning.

Big cases, sure. He probably hadn't left his favorite stool at Clancy's Bar all month except to sleep. (I had called him at Clancy's.)

I marvel at guys like Marchetti though. When I phoned the next day he knew more about that pair of hustlers than I could have found out in a month. The woman's name—her real one—was Teresa McNair and she had served eighteen months for some kind of scam a few years earlier. Nick couldn't be a hundred percent certain about the guy but his description fit one of Teresa's cohorts, a two-time loser named Joe Schnell, a small-time grifter.

That didn't prove anything, but it removed all doubt in my mind that they were pulling something and Drake was the mark. I reminded Marchetti to be ready for a fast trip to Cincy and then sat back and tried to think it through. I didn't have any luck so I hopped a shuttle to the races at River Downs.

My luck wasn't any better at the track and I hung around too long trying to get back even. Instead of arriving at the park three hours before game time like I should have, I jumped out of a cab at Riverfront Stadium ten minutes before the first pitch. I ran in the gate, took the elevator to the press box, signed in, hurried to the bulletin board, and began scribbling the lineups in my scorebook.

It took a while for it to soak in that Freddy DeAngelo and not Drake was at third base for the Stars. Freddy was O.K. in the field but, like with most utility men, you could add his weight and his waistline and come up with his batting average. I rushed through the rest of the lineup and slipped into a seat next to Brophy.

"What's the matter with Drake?" I said.

Brophy frowned at me. "Where the hell have you been?"

"At the track. What about Drake?"

"He didn't show. You'da known that if you'd been here."

"No kidding!" It was such a surprise I didn't even think to tell Brophy he wasn't my babysitter. Ball players below the level of superstar don't turn up missing when a game's scheduled. For that matter, not many superstars do either.

"That's right," Brophy said. "Nobody knows where he is. They checked back at the hotel but he wasn't there. Checked the hospitals too, but he didn't turn up."

"Cover for me, will you?" I said and walked to the phone at the top of the press box where the Cincinnati publicity director sits. I thought

better of it, went down the hallway to a room behind the broadcast booths. You could use the phones there without having half the writers in the press box listening in.

After getting past the bartender at Clancy's and another "Yeah?" from Marchetti I said, "Grab the next plane out here."

When I got back to my seat the Reds were still batting in the bottom of the first and already had three runs on the board. If they didn't snap out of it in a hurry the Stars could quit looking up at the Phillies and start glancing over their shoulders to see who was coming up on them from behind.

I couldn't concentrate on the game. The press box at Riverfront is enclosed and it's so tight you can't hear the crowd unless everyone screams at the same time. If you take your eyes off the field for very long you miss something. It's a little unreal, almost like watching figures move around on one of those tabletop games. I'm not crazy about it and with my mind on Drake it was intolerable.

"Cover for me, will you?" I said and Brophy looked up, irritated as hell.

"After I write your story for you should I send it over or will you take care of that yourself?" he said.

"I'll bring you a beer," I said, and he mellowed a little.

"And a bag of peanuts!" he called after me.

I walked down the corridor to the press dining room, ordered a ham and swiss on rye and a beer. I spotted Joe Tyner, the Stars' publicity director, lounging on a sofa talking to a couple of Cincinnati front-office people. I walked over, sat down, and said, "Joe, what's this about Drake?"

"He didn't show."

"Hell, I know that. Any idea where he is?"

"If I had one I wouldn't be sitting here."

"When was the last time anybody saw him?"

"Turk Macy and Tommy Hartsfeld had lunch with him. Nobody remembers seeing him after that."

I stood up and walked over to the windows; saw a couple of more Reds circling the bases in eerie silence far below, got Brophy's beer and peanuts, and went back. At that point it looked like I knew more than anyone else and it sure wasn't much.

The game was a real yawner to the end. The Stars couldn't have looked

worse if Brophy and I had handled the batting. They were shut out on three hits while the Reds sent eight men across the plate. I made sure I was on the first elevator down to the clubhouse level. I wanted to be back upstairs by eleven so I could phone my paper at a time when everyone would be there.

When we unloaded I was the only one to turn right and head for the Stars' clubhouse. I squeezed around the bus parked right in front of the door, crossed the tiny lobby, and pulled up short when a guard stuck the flat of his hand against my chest. "No reporters until McGann gives the word," he said. "He's called a meeting."

There was nothing I could do but cuss, turn around, and go back the other way. I'd have to settle for whatever I could get down the hall. Winners are always ready to talk, but I was in too big a hurry to want to hear much of it.

The Cincinnati clubhouse is really plush, right down to the red wall-to-wall carpet. The elevator had already made its second run down from the press box so writers and broadcasters were lined up two deep in front of the winning pitcher's cubicle. I made do with a few words of wisdom from a muscular outfielder who had hit one downtown and walked into Feisty Parker's private office. The Cincy manager had a plate of chicken, another of sliced tomatoes, and a big glass of milk in front of him but he ignored them long enough to help me out with a few quick, pointed remarks about the trouble the Stars were having.

I rode back upstairs and called Ted Constable, my sports editor, and he got the managing editor, Ken Knight, on an extension. I explained the situation and Knight said the paper would pay the freight for Marchetti. Ted told me to get busy and send over a sidebar on Drake's disappearance along with my game story.

When Brophy came back up, I wormed a couple of things out of him that McGann had said once he unlocked the door. I got my copy out in a hurry, sent it over on the teleprinter, and was back at the hotel by one o'clock and in the sack half an hour later.

Marchetti walked into the hotel dining room at seven-thirty in the morning. He wouldn't say a word until he had gulped a cup of coffee, but he grinned when I told him he was working for the newspaper and not me personally. Brophy just about popped an eyeball when he came in and saw Marchetti with me and then shot a few daggers my direction

when I shooed him away from the table. He sat down in a booth fifteen feet away. His right ear looked like the RCA Victor trumpet, but we made sure he couldn't hear anything.

I filled Marchetti in on the little I knew. He thought about it a while and then told me his first move would be checking the car-rental outfits.

"He's a troubled young man," Marchetti said. "Five'll get you ten he's holed up in some small town to think over whatever it is that's bugging him. He'd want to get away from the city to a place where he felt more comfortable. Any idea where he'd head?"

"Back toward Iowa, I'll bet. But I doubt if he'd go very far."

We walked up to the lobby and I bought a large road atlas at the newsstand. Marchetti crammed it in his flight bag in case we ran into Brophy again and we went on up to my room and looked it over.

"Indiana," I said. "If your idea is right, he'd want to get away from metropolitan Cincinnati. I don't think he'd go north or east, that'd keep him in Ohio, and I doubt if he'd head south into Kentucky. Indiana would seem more like home, so he'd drive west. And if he really started out for Iowa that would put him in Indiana too."

Marchetti nodded. "Sounds good. Let's look at Indiana." I thumbed pages to the right map and then we studied it for a minute or two.

"Maybe he'd follow the river," I said. "How about Lawrenceburg or Madison?"

Marchetti shook his head. "Naw, look at that road. It follows every bend in the Ohio. Not knowing the area, he'd take an interstate. Probably stop at the first place he came to with a motel or hotel that wasn't too conspicuous." He ran a finger along I-74 and said, "Batesville, Greensburg, or Shelbyville, I'll bet."

"That's if he left town at all. He might be holed up right here in Cincy."

"Not unless he's got a friend who'd hide him out. Do you know of any?"

"No, and I doubt if Drake would have made any friends here. This would be—let's see—only the sixth time he's been in Cincinnati, and he isn't the type to make friends in a hurry."

We went back downstairs. Marchetti was going to check on car rentals while I went to the other hotel to see if Teresa and her friend were still there. They were. Marchetti didn't come up with anything but he had rented a car and by nine-thirty we were cruising along the interstate toward Indiana.

We reached Batesville, our first stop, in an hour. We had seen several signs along the highway touting an old inn downtown so we headed for it, figuring Drake might have done the same thing. Sure enough, when I showed the woman at the desk a photo of Drake in street clothes, she said he was in Room 22.

Talk about luck. I guess Marchetti would have called it headwork.

We climbed the stairs. I knocked on the door and when Drake asked, "Who's there?" Marchetti said, "Maintenance man."

Drake's jaw dropped when he opened the door and saw me standing there. He tried to slam it shut again but Marchetti was in the way. Drake shrugged his shoulders and said, "O.K., come on in."

It wasn't a situation where you'd start off talking about the weather so I said, "What's the trouble, Tony?"

He slumped down in a chair, lowered his head, and shook it without saying anything.

"Something to do with that woman, right?"

He looked up at me, surprised. I guess farm kids aren't as suspicious by nature as people like me. Of course newspapermen get paid for being nosy. "How'd you know?" he said.

I introduced Marchetti and said, "He checked up on her. She's a con artist, Tony, and so is the guy with her."

He shook his head again and said, "No, you've got her wrong. The man too. He's her lawyer—Mr. Mendelbaum."

Marchetti and I laughed. Schnell had given Tony a name that at least sounded like a lawyer's.

"He's no lawyer, buddy," Marchetti said and went on to explain who Schnell really was and then told Tony about Teresa.

Tony sat there slack-jawed, moving his head from side to side. He had never encountered people like that before.

"They're shaking you down, aren't they, Tony?" I said. "What about?"

Tony looked guilty as sin. "It's not the way you think. She's pregnant. She's a nice lady, but she says she has no choice but to file a paternity suit unless I can give her fifty thousand so she can get away someplace and have the baby. Mr. Mendelbaum has the papers all drawn up."

Marchetti whistled and asked, "Could she be?"

Drake's face was crimson. He nodded his head and stammered, "The first time we were in Chicago. You've got her wrong though. She's real nice, but if Myra hears about this—"

Myra was the girl back in Iowa. He was right about what she'd think—not to mention Mom and Dad and everybody else in that little burg. Teresa had picked her man with care.

"Tony," I said, "you don't even make fifty grand a year, do you?"

He was staring at the floor. "Forty-seven," he mumbled.

That was the one point where Teresa had gone wrong. She and Schnell must have heard about some of those inflated salaries the big names get and figured it applied to everybody. It doesn't, not by a long sight. Another good season or two and Drake might be in the six-figure bracket, but if he slipped even a little more he never would be.

As for the paternity suit, it's the big rage. A woman gets pregnant, claims a ball player or a movie star or a politician is responsible, and there's a fair chance he'll lay a settlement on her just to keep it out of the papers. Ball players are sitting ducks even more than the others because anybody who can read the sports pages can find out exactly where they are on any given day for seven or eight months out of the year. A wet-behind-the-ears kid like Drake would be especially vulnerable to the threat. If he'd had the money, you can bet he would have handed it over in a hurry.

I said, "Tony, she's no more pregnant than I am. These aren't a couple of people off the street, they're convicted shakedown artists and the only way to deal with them is to call their bluff and put them back behind bars."

His head came up, his face agonized. "But it'll be in the papers!" he said. "Everybody'll know about it!"

"It'll be in the papers—there's no way to keep it out—but there's no proof if you deny it."

"If they're arrested, the details will come out at their trial."

"No, they won't," Marchetti said, "because there won't be any trial. They'll cop a plea to a reduced charge. You can bank on it."

Drake looked at me and I gave him a nod that was meant to be reassuring. "There's no other way, Tony. Marchetti might be able to scare them off, but you'd still have to explain your disappearing act. Unless you were damn convincing it would make the writers more curious than ever. Somebody would dig out the story and it would sound worse than it actually is. This way you'll be the good guy—the innocent, indignant victim who wouldn't stand still for a shakedown."

Drake thought about it a minute and said, "I guess you're right." You

could see he was relieved to have someone else making the decisions. "So what do I do now?"

"First get back to Cincy and explain it to McGann," I told him. "I'll go with you and help out."

"After that," Marchetti cut in, "set up a meeting with them. Tell them you have the money. Set it up for late tonight in the restaurant at their hotel. In the meantime, I'll make arrangements with the Cincinnati police and we'll be at the next table."

"And stay away from other reporters until it's all over," I added.

Drake grinned at that. It had been so long I was surprised he still remembered how. "You guys never quit, do you?"

"Not if we expect to keep drawing a paycheck. Now let's go."

I rode back to town with him and Marchetti drove back alone. I called McGann from a booth on the outskirts of town, told him I had Drake with me and to meet us at a coffee shop I could see down the road. An hour later he was there with Eldon Braniger, the Stars' general manager.

Drake made three or four false starts that didn't get beyond "I—uh—" so I took over and explained the situation. Braniger said Tony would be fined for missing the game, but it wasn't in the same league with the figure Teresa was trying to pry out of him. He and McGann agreed it would remain confidential—a "no comment" deal—until the arrests were made that night.

It was a Saturday and the schedule makers hadn't been able to decide between an afternoon and a night game, so they split the difference and settled on a twi-nighter. That was good. It should be over in plenty of time for me to get the story, since I'd be on the scene, but too late for the other papers to pick it up for their Sunday editions.

When we got to the hotel we hurried across the lobby and up to my room. I kept Drake there for the hour and a half before we'd have to leave for the stadium. He called Myra and his parents and I called Ken Knight at his home, made arrangements for a hole on Page One, and told him I might run a little past deadline. He countered with forty reasons why I shouldn't. I had heard them all before.

After that, Tony called Teresa, and I could hear her sigh of relief clear across the room. She and Schnell must have been really uptight when Tony pulled his disappearing act. He gave her a trumped-up story about having to go somewhere to get the money, and the meeting was set for eleven o'clock. She wanted it right away but he told her he was ready

to leave for the ball park. Then she wanted it earlier in the evening but he told her no, it might be an extra-inning game. I shuddered at the idea.

Marchetti called a few minutes later and said everything was set up with the Cincinnati police and all he needed was a time. I gave it to him and then Drake and I slipped out the service entrance and took a cab to Riverfront.

Pat McGann called the writers together while the Reds were taking batting practice. "Tony Drake missed last night's game because of a personal matter which I can't reveal," he said, and was promptly bombarded with questions asking him to.

When they saw McGann meant it about not saying anything more, they rushed out of his office in search of Tony. He had outsmarted them and was in the trainer's room, which is off limits to reporters. He skipped batting practice and stayed where he was until the writers were cleared from the field, then he hurried out to take infield with the team.

Drake started but McGann pulled him after four innings and sent Freddy DeAngelo out. Tony had been like a zombie out there, but his presence must have ignited the rest of the club, or something did because the Stars hit the ball all over the park and hammered the Reds, 10-2.

The game ended a little after eight, so I had all kinds of time to write my story before going to the restaurant. I cheated and went ahead and wrote the arrest story ahead of time, figuring how it was likely to go. I sent it over along with the game story and instructions to hold it until they heard from me.

Marchetti slipped Drake into the restaurant through the kitchen half an hour early so he would be waiting at the table they had picked for him when the others arrived. A Cincinnati detective and Marchetti were at the next one, but I was told to sit across the room in case Teresa or Schnell recognized me. Drake had an envelope with a stack of paper in it and a hundred-dollar bill at each end of the stack.

The con artists came in a couple of minutes before eleven and went straight to Drake's table, all smiles. They made a real production of it. Schnell had some kind of a phony release he had Teresa sign and he handed it to Drake at the same time Tony passed him the envelope.

Schnell ran a finger under the seal but before he could open it the detective had a hand on his shoulder. Marchetti was standing behind Teresa in case she decided to play rough, but she didn't. It was all over

before I finished my salad. Drake joined me when the others had gone, shaky but happy.

"Thanks," he said.

"Don't mention it. Keep an eye on things till I get back." I went to a phone, called Ken Knight, and told him it was O.K. to go with the story the way I sent it over. Poor Brophy, I thought. He'd catch hell over the phone in the morning.

Drake was a terror the next afternoon. Three for four at the plate, a couple of runs batted in, three great plays in the field. Brophy sulked through the game, so I knew he had gotten that phone call. We were staying in Cincy overnight and catching a morning flight to Pittsburgh, so I told him dinner and drinks were on me at the Maisonette.

That snapped him out of it fast. Nobody appreciates good food and drink more than Brophy and, knowing his capacity, I figured the evening was going to set me back seventy-five or a hundred. I had that figured too. Since my expense voucher was going to be on the heavy side anyway, Ken Knight wouldn't mind a little extra to buy dinner for a downhearted rival.

I was dead wrong about that part. But, hell, nobody bats a thousand.

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Letters

I've been a mystery fan for a long time now and I've always enjoyed the works of John Dickson Carr. I would like to know if you know of any good reference work relating to "locked room" novels and short stories.

Could you please send me the address of the Mystery Writers of America?

Alan L. Mescallado
San Juan, Rizal, Philippines

The only work that comes to mind is an article titled "The Locked Room" that Mr. Carr himself published some years ago. Your local library may be able to help you track it down in an anthology—and also any other references on the locked room.

The address of Mystery Writers of America is 105 East 19th St., New York, N.Y. 10003.—S.C.

I've been a fan of the magazine for about five years and especially enjoy the stories by Ernest Savage. I've noticed that in many of his stories there is a character named Charlie or Charley. Is there some reason for this, do you know?

Bill Currier
San Francisco, California

Mr. Savage replies, "I have no clear, straightforward answer to the question as to why so many characters named Charley appear in my stories. In fact, I was unaware of it until this reader pointed it out."

"I have known 'Charlies' all my life; and, in fact, my current best fishing buddy is a Charles. Also, I named my only daughter Charlotte, so—hmmmmmm!"

Thank you for putting more whodunit mysteries in your magazine. I have really enjoyed some of the stories in your recent issues, especially "The Mayhew Job," "The Paris Strangler," "Killer in Town," "Easy Change," "Perfect Solution," and "Slaughterhouse." I wish you would put more stories by Edward D. Hoch in your magazine. By the way, I like your new Crime on Screen column. Also, when will your next anthology come out?

Robert Abele
Richardson, Texas

Alfred Hitchcock's Anthology #6, Spring/Summer 1980, went on sale in December. AHA # 7 is scheduled for release at the end of May.—S.C.

I am very glad to see you now have a letters section! I have been a reader for many years and have never ever been disappointed. I can never put AHMM down once I get it. All of the stories are good and I hope that this type of literature will get the recognition it deserves. I like everything about AHMM—it's really quality, class stuff.

Joan Dora
Houston, Texas

I have been a great admirer of John Lutz's work for years and his stories are one of the major reasons I subscribe to AHMM. Can you tell me a little about him?

J. T. Castle
St. Paul, Minnesota

John Lutz was born in Dallas, Texas, and has lived in St. Louis, Missouri, for many years. He's had a number of jobs including theater usher, truck driver, and switchboard operator for the St. Louis Police Department. His first published mystery story, "Thieves' Honor," appeared in AHMM

in 1966. John has been writing full time for about the past five years and though he now devotes most of his time to novels—his latest, Lazarus Man, was published in 1979 by William Morrow—he says, “I doubt if I’ll ever desert the short story. Too much fun. Too many possibilities.” We fervently hope he never does.—S.C.

If you have any questions about stories or authors in AHMM or the mystery field in general, please write to me: Susan Calderella, Letters Editor, Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017, and I'll do my best to answer them.

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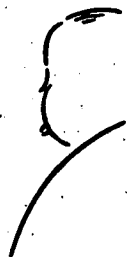
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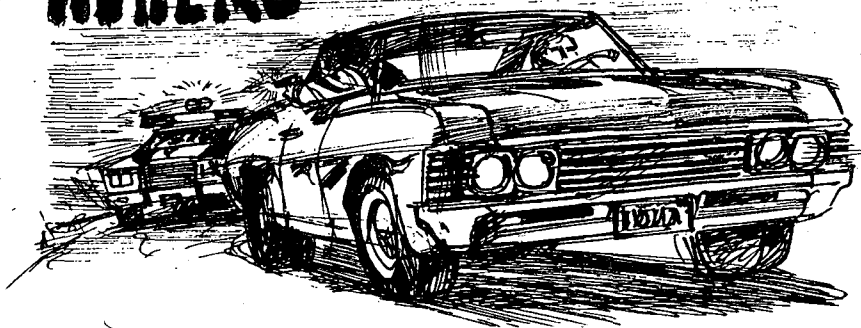
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Frankie Coll, heister, wanted to get out and settle down . . .



REFORM CARROLL MOVEMENT MAYERS



Sure, I'll tell you the whole story. You'll have to realize, though, some of it's rather wild.

First off, I couldn't believe my ears that night. Frankie Coll was one of the best partners I'd ever had. Since we'd teamed up five months ago—our mutual penchant had surfaced during a casual bar conversation—we'd had a string of tidy scores. Suburban banks, mostly. Right now there was fifty-two grand tucked in a satchel in our hotel closet. And

yet Frankie had just told me he was pulling out.

"You're *what*?"

"I've decided to quit, Lou," he repeated. "I'm packing it in."

I gaped at him. "Why, for Pete's sake? We're going great—"

He made a vague gesture. He was a slim, wiry character with dark good looks. "That last go-round was a little hairy."

I granted him that. We'd just peeled away from our last hit with that fifty-two thousand when a cruising sheriff's deputy had intercepted us. We'd managed to shake him, but only after a careening chase over narrow country roads, with a fusillade of shots exchanged and the deputy's car ending up in a ditch. Once clear, we'd still poured it on, finally ending up some eighty miles away in this hick town of Madison Springs. We were lying low for a week.

"We've had squeakers before," I said.

Frankie nodded. "I know. But—well, it's more than that. I like this town. It's quiet, restful. A guy can get out of the rat race here, settle down."

I couldn't credit any of this. "It's quiet, all right," I said. "Dullsville, in spades. You'd be climbing walls."

He shook his head. "Not necessarily. Not if I had something to do."

He cited me the whole script then. The owner of the local smoke shop was giving up and going to live with his brother in Arizona because of some health problem. Frankie had been talking to the man and had a chance to buy the business for twenty-five thousand—his half of our present stake.

I told you some of this was wild. Frankie Coll, heister, reforming. Hah!

But Frankie didn't think so. "I'm going to do it, Lou," he told me soberly. "There're two other joes interested, so I've got to act fast."

"But you can't!" I protested. "Aside from everything else, you don't know the first thing about running a tobacco store."

"I can learn," Frankie said.

There was more, of course; we batted his crazy intention back and forth for over three hours. I even brought up how easy it would be for us to augment that fifty-two thousand by heisting the local bank as we pulled out. "It's a crackerjack box. I've checked it out. No alarm system, no cameras, one old guard—"

Frankie wasn't listening. "Save your breath, Lou. My mind's made up."

So there it was. When we finally hit the sack at 2:00 A.M., I knew I'd lost. And it was sad—because with the two of us in tandem there was no telling how far we could've gone: plenty of cash, girls, bright spots like Vegas.

Damn! Lying there in the dark, sleepless, listening to Frankie's heavy slumber, I grew more depressed every minute until, abruptly, I wasn't depressed at all. My pulse speeded as I cranked the idea through my mind again. In another minute I was easing out of bed.

I dressed quietly, retrieved the satchel from the closet, scribbled a note in the dark, and left it and a couple of thousand on the bureau. Then I simply slipped down the hotel's service stairs, got into our souped-up Chevy out back, and took off. An hour later I'd put Madison Springs far behind me.

I fleshed out my ploy as I drove. My sister worked nights as a cocktail waitress in a lounge in Capital City. I could reach there in five or six hours. Sue didn't approve of my life style, but she'd given up trying to change me.

In point of fact, she wasn't too happy with her own situation, what with all the creeps with hot eyes and four hands she had to serve. But she hung on and I sent her five hundred or so as often as I could.

I still meant to lie low for another couple of weeks; and I knew Sue would put me up.

"Lou!" She gave me a warm hug and kissed me when I walked into her apartment shortly after eight. "What in the world—?"

We hadn't seen each other in nearly a year and she looked great to me. Dark auburn hair, smoky grey eyes, trim figure. "Hi, Sis," I said. "Everything O.K.?"

She built a wry smile. "Sure—like always." Then she added seriously, "You're O.K. yourself? You're not in any trouble?"

"None at all," I said. "But I would like to lay over here a spell."

Despite my reassurance, she still was skeptical over my well-being, so I told her the entire charade. "In the note I left," I finished, "I told Frankie to meet me—and *all* the money—at a motel we've used upstate, in two weeks. By then that smoke-shop owner will have sold out to somebody else. There were at least two other prospective buyers." I grinned. "With no cash to speak of, he'll have no alternative. And when he does show, we can pick up as before."

Sue frowned. She'd never met Frankie, but obviously she didn't approve. "That's sort of a crummy trick, Lou."

"I had to do it," I said. "We're a great team."

Sue was pensive. After a moment she said, "You're more than welcome here, of course, but there are a couple of points—"

"Eh?"

"First, all that money. You'd better rent a safe-deposit box temporarily. This isn't the safest neighborhood."

"Good idea," I said. "What's the other problem?"

She indicated a small traveling bag by the door. "You'll have to eat out or buy some groceries, do your own cooking. I'm taking a two weeks' vacation with a girl friend; she's meeting me at the bus station at nine." Sue gestured toward the kitchen. "I can't even give you breakfast. I cleaned out the refrigerator last night."

"So it all works out," I said, replenishing my wallet with a couple of hundreds from the money satchel. "I take you down to the bus, stop off for breakfast, collect some comestibles, then stop back here for my—ah—" I grinned—"deposit. By then the banks will be open. What's the nearest one?"

And that's how it did work out, with one exception. Again, wild, like I warned you. Because an hour or so later when I stopped back at the apartment, I found the rear kitchen window broken and the place thoroughly ransacked.

Naturally, the money satchel was gone.

I ranted and raved, kicked the furniture, put it back in place, and then kicked it again. Finally, though, I let up. I'd been stupid. I'd asked for it. I should have lugged the satchel with me; Sue had told me the area was a target for break-ins.

So what was ahead now? Two quiet weeks alone in the apartment about summed up my immediate future. I had enough pocket money to carry me. After that, though, when I met Frankie again, things would get back to normal. We'd make some quick, lucrative scores.

Because I still intended to keep that motel date. And I was confident Frankie would too. He would have been teed off when he discovered me gone, sure, but he would have no idea where to run me down in the interim. Also, he would have realized the true reason for my caper and appreciate that our relationship was such that I'd follow through.

So I bided my time, loafed around the apartment, fixed the kitchen window. The day before the motel date I left Sue a note of appreciation, turned the key over to a neighbor, and drove upstate to the motel.

In all truth, I wasn't looking forward to the confrontation. For all I've said, I knew Frankie would be steaming—all the more when he learned I'd lost the money. But I still figured I could placate him, pick up the threads.

I needn't have fretted. Frankie didn't show.

I couldn't understand it. I waited three days, thinking perhaps it was a transportation problem, I having taken our car. Even so, that didn't make sense—Frankie could have rented a heap or even taken a bus.

Finally, I gave up at the motel. I couldn't truly picture Frankie still being at Madison Springs, but he might have done or said something—perhaps to that smoke-shop character—that would tip me as to where he'd gone.

So after those three days I drove back, and the whole affair coalesced into its crazy denouement. Because Frankie *was* still in town. More, he was standing in front of the smoke shop and, recognizing me as I drove up, he didn't scowl or threaten.

Rather, he grinned and waved. "Hello, Lou."

I parked and got out of the Chevy, not quite sure how to play it. "Hi, Frankie," I said cautiously.

His grin held. "I've been expecting you," he said. "Actually, I should say 'we'."

I blinked. "We?"

"The new owner and I," Frankie said. "Come on in—I'll introduce you."

You're probably well ahead of me now. That's right—the new owner was my sister.

Sue smiled as I goggled at her across the counter. "Surprised, Lou? You shouldn't be."

Suddenly things began to fall into place. I eyed Sue intently, even managed to dredge up a small smile of my own. "Were you actually going on a vacation?" I asked.

She nodded. "I really was, until you showed up and I heard your story." She exchanged a look with Frankie. "Then I had a better idea."

That she had—an inspired, spur-of-the-moment brainstorm to get out

of the rut she had been in so long. She'd laid the foundation with that "unsafe neighborhood" bit. After I'd dropped her at the bus station and was occupied getting breakfast and groceries, she'd nipped back to the apartment, let herself in with an extra key, set the stage for the break-in, and hightailed it to Madison Springs with the money and closed the smoke-shop deal.

I drew a breath. "Clever. Very clever," I said.

Frankie said seriously, "I hit the ceiling at first, Lou. Really hit it." Then he laughed. "But it all worked out for the best. Your own half of what we had is still here. No hard feelings."

Wild, like I said, Sue and Frankie are doing great and plan to get married next month. Maybe Frankie had the right idea after all. I just may try his "reform" bit when I get out.

Of course, that won't be for quite a few years. And while I'm still here there's plenty of time for me to reconsider Frankie's "No hard feelings." Even with Sue being my sister, he still might've meant to pay me back for my caper, would've instinctively known I'd move to swell my twenty-five G's by trying to heist that crackerjack-box bank before I left town, and alerted that aging guard.

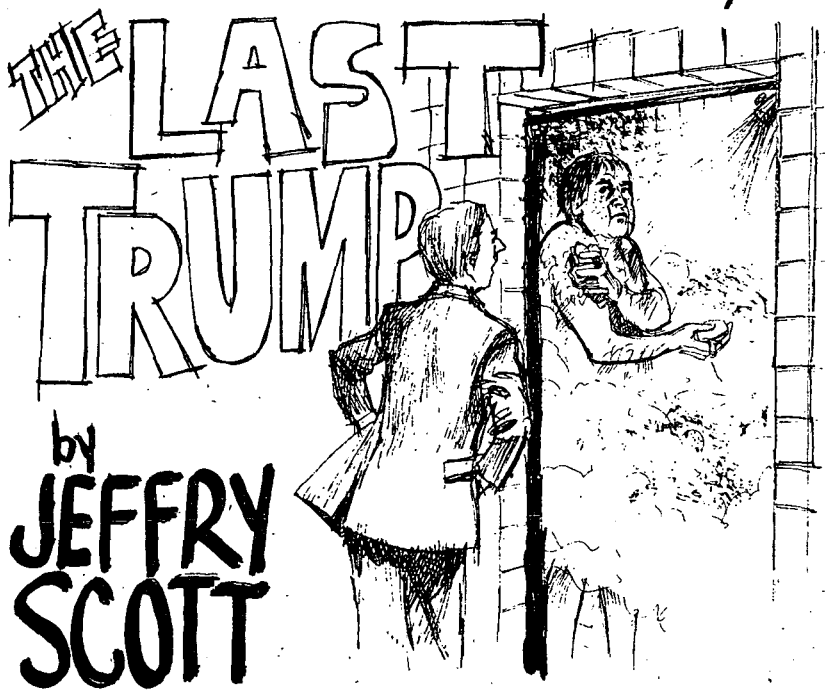
I guess I'll never know for sure.

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Bunting suspected he could buy and sell Trump before breakfast . . .



The devotion, love, and constant attention expended by Porter Bunting could never be described as selfless, because it was lavished upon himself. Of course, he was one of the Boston Buntings, but that had little to do with it; he simply knew of no other person more deserving and estimable.

Unlovely enough—obese, wattled, age-freckled, in his forties—Porter still suffered from terminal narcissism. Sometimes he woke in the night, amending Shakespeare slightly to marvel at what a piece of work was

Porter Bunting. Even his hearing became oddly selective as the disease kindled and advanced. Accused by an exasperated hundred-dollar hooker in Miami of being "a first-class creep," Bunting merely smirked and creased his belly in a bow that compounded the harlot's fury. He had heard only the first three words.

Business took him to Liberville, that model Socialist Republic that simmers in brutal sunlight when it is not being soured by the rainy season. Porter Bunting stayed at the best hotel, the Tropique, and very bad it was. He just couldn't understand how an entire nation could conspire to test and torment him to such a pitch.

At the Tropique, he encountered The Last Trump.

You may well have done the same. Ronnie Trump travels such a lot; selling things. A battered cherub, a knowing gnome, teasing flight attendants, forever bagging the last taxi at the terminal, the first sitting at the Captain's table.

"Trump's the name, and I am a bit of a card," Ronnie always crows by way of introduction.

In a way, their foregathering on the veranda of the Tropique, a place of warped timbers and flaccid greenery more gloomy than shady, was a meeting of titans: first-class creep meets first-class pain.

To make it worse, Bunting had to acknowledge him. Trump's parents had sent him overseas from England at the outbreak of World War II. He had spent a short, best forgotten time at Porter Bunting's prep school and recognized Porter at once.

Porter Bunting, naturally, has trouble recollecting distant members of his own family. People who have been mere walk-on characters in the Bunting saga are forgotten not merely soon after but at the very moment of meeting. However, while he did not remember Ronnie Trump a shadow glided across the farthest horizon of his emotional landscape. Something about the fellow . . .

Trump was enthusiastic though. "Bit of luck for The Last Trump," he chortled. "What're you doing in dear old Liverville, old chap? Bad Liverville, you'll soon discover. Trying to maake your fortune, eh?"

Bunting suspected, as he did of everyone bar oil sheiks, that he could buy and sell Ronnie before breakfast. He snorted indignantly and huffed something about delicate negotiations. Trump whirled a card-index be-

hind his knobbly forehead, winked, and said, "Aha—the new telephone system. You'll have to grease a lot of palms, my lad. And you'll hang around here until you've got whiskers past your knees. Boy! Two gin slings, chop chop!"

Bunting said shortly, "I never drink gin. Anyway, the waiters won't come. I've been out here for hours"—it had been seven and a half minutes—"and they simply ignore one."

Immediately a lithe servant materialized at Trump's elbow, greeted him fawningly, and sped away. Trump, a moment later, was sipping at an ice-hazed tumbler while Bunting fumed.

"Damned country!" Bunting exploded. "Nothing but a living museum of graft and lethargy." Rolling pettishly in his cane lounge, he gestured at the twilight street outside. "Nothing happens, nothing ever will happen."

Trump put the drink aside, hugged his knees, and beamed. "Now there you're wrong. If it's action you're after, old chap, you may get more than you like." Head cocked on one side, he resembled a sponge-rubber gargoyle.

Something in his aura—that crass cheerfulness prevailing at funerals and among witnesses of traffic accidents—made Porter Bunting feel uneasy. He was not soothed when Ronnie Trump added, "My word, but I admire your spirit! Talk about true grit . . ."

Bunting grunted interrogatively. Trump clasped himself tighter. "Why, your little dispute with Lyfeldt over water rights this morning. Oh, I wasn't eavesdropping, 'pon my soul! But everyone could hear you all over the second floor."

Though he remained impassive, Porter Bunting bridled and smirked inwardly. That morning he had discovered that, like most of the Hotel Tropique's fittings and staff, the shower would not work.

The bedroom next door had been vacant the previous night, so Bunting went in there. The thin, grey, whiny-voiced occupant—Lyfeldt, evidently—had come in from breakfast, while Bunting soaped and slopped and crooned, and demanded to know what was going on.

Bunting couldn't repress a chuckle. He'd told Lyfeldt a thing or three! Sneaking in like that, little better than a peeping tom—some kind of degenerate! Feebly, Lyfeldt strove to point out that the room was his, slept in and paid for; that the towel covering the intruder's paunch was Lyfeldt's towel.

Progressively more choleric, Porter Bunting shouted him down before storming out, dripping water on Lyfeldt's luggage. His anger had been genuine. He found it nigh impossible to accept that anyone could not understand that Bunting's comfort, convenience, and well being were matters of self-evident priority.

"Bit of a lark, eh?" Trump prompted, and Bunting, coming back to the present, compressed his chins in a grudging nod.

"The man looked like a sick rat by the time I was through with him," he agreed. "People are incredibly selfish and stupid, I find."

Trump made sympathetic noises. "All the same . . ." He rubbed his bulbous little nose. "I wouldn't have the guts to do what you did. I mean, do you know who Lyfeldt is?" Here Ronnie Trump checked himself, became more conspiratorial and confiding. "Or, rather, *what* he is?"

Bunting stared at him.

"Lyfeldt is a hit man." Trump seemed boyishly excited. "I was in Las Vegas—oh, ten years ago. Selling toilet installations to one of those new hotel-casinos. Not to put too fine a point on it, old man, my clients were gangsters. They pointed Lyfeldt out to me. He works for—um—organized crime, as they say. Kills people."

A bubble of gas jumped into Porter Bunting's gullet. The pain, sharp and unexpected, quite unmanned him. And it was so cold out on that veranda.

Trump drained his glass and smacked his lips. "Not to worry, old chap. He's not a homicidal maniac, you know. He only kills for money."

Clearing his throat, Bunting said, "Nonsense." There was a note of pleading in his voice.

"You know best," Trump countered, in a tone conveying the exact opposite. "Lyfeldt's an assassin, sure enough. You must have seen his name in the papers when that—you know—when that truckers' union official vanished, Lyfeldt's name was raised."

Lips trembling, Bunting mumbled, "I'm not afraid. I have a certain standing. One word to the embassy here and I could have him deported."

Trump stiffened and tapped his friend's arm. "Lower your voice," he suggested dryly. "Lyfeldt just came in."

Porter Bunting craned around, a rabbit at bay. Lyfeldt stood at the far corner of the veranda. His face was in shadow but his whole stance was a glare. Bunting tried to assemble a placating smile but his facial muscles were stiff with dread. Lyfeldt stepped back into deeper shadow, retreating

to the dining room, white suit gleaming fitfully. Like something underwater. That shark Bunting had seen while cruising in the Gulf of Mexico had had the same implicit menace.

Reading his friend's expression, Ronnie Trump whistled shrilly. "Golly, you *didn't* know who he was when you tore him off a strip. Well, never mind. Those super-tough characters find it quite amusing when somebody bullies 'em."

"He—he didn't look amused just now. Should I call the police, get protection?"

Trump pondered the idea. "Bad notion, old man. You know the police here—corrupt as billy-o, every man Jack. Lyfeldt's probably got them all on his payroll." Trump snapped his fingers. "Come to think of it, when I was here last year there was some talk about him buying the Minister of the Interior, to stay safe from extradition for that triple murder in Brooklyn. He's been here ever since."

Porter Bunting sat transfixed, like a stone statue of a jelly. "Could you—?" he croaked before his throat dried to muteness.

For an instant Trump looked startled, even hostile. Then he shrugged, mopped his brow, and was beaming again. "All right, I'm a neutral between you Yanks! I'll have a word with Lyfeldt—is that what you want?"

A fervent nod, a ghostly approving smirk.

Trump brushed his hands together. "Right. Tell him it was a rush of blood to the head, a fit of nerves, normally you're the most amiable bloke in the world—that style of thing?"

"I was wrong," Bunting whispered. "Very, very wrong. Unpardonably rude. It's the heat here. I wasn't myself, not at all myself. Tell him, Ronnie. I'll be delighted to apologize, but only if you can smooth the way."

Trump became gloomy. "It can't be done. I haven't been introduced to Lyfeldt."

Porter Bunting wanted to throttle him. "Special circumstances," he croaked imploringly. "No need to stand on ceremony, we're all—" *What? All what?* he asked himself wildly. "All strangers in a strange land. We should stick together."

"He might buy it, I suppose," Ronnie Trump observed dubiously. "Very well, you beetle straight up to your room and stay there. I'll report progress in the morning. Don't open your door until I knock—oh, five times."

"The morning?"

"Well, I can't rush into this baldheaded," Trump reminded him a trifle stiffly. "I only *call* myself The Last Trump. There's my missus and the little Trumps, you know—reg'lar bridge hand. I'll wait till Lyfeldt's finished dinner, stand him a few drinks before he turns in. Gradual approach, d'ye see?"

And he bustled away, flicking cigarette ash off the lapels of his deplorable chain-store safari jacket.

Bunting spent a bad three hours. The room was stifling, its air conditioner a rusted monument to vanished ease. Outside, insects chirped the same three notes endlessly, or made noises like broken glass cascading down concrete ramps. Little creatures died noisily at the hands of unthinkable, invisible predators and Porter Bunting could empathize with them to the final nerve flicker of desperation and lethal agony. There were birds, sounding like giant fingernails scraping acre-wide blackboards, that he found especially trying.

At 1:00 A.M. he could bear it no longer, and after no more than twenty minutes on the bedside phone he contacted the front desk. Mr. Trump? Oh, he had departed. But certainly, Mr. Trump. We all love Mr. Trump. He departed by taximeter-cabriolet to catch the midnight flight to El Salvador.

Porter Bunting was stung by a chip of plastic in crashing the receiver down. Perfidious Albion, damned gutless limeys! Trump had run out on him.

That was when Bunting heard the footfall in the corridor. Just one, then a creaking, almost breathing, not-quite-sound of furtive steps which stopped outside his door.

He rolled off the bed and, soundless on shoeless feet, scuttled to the window. A balcony ran the width of the Tropique's second floor, and Bunting fled to it. Presently it occurred to him that the balcony opened on either end of the long corridor passing the bedrooms up there.

He stole past window after window, turned sharp right, opened a door with care—requiring thirty seconds to move it a couple of feet ajar—and peered along the corridor.

Immediately he felt sick. Lyfeldt was outside his door. The man wore a terry-cloth robe ending just below the knees, and his limbs looked unpleasantly gaunt and pallid, like an allegorical figure of Death.

As Bunting watched, Lyfeldt's left hand came out, hovered tentatively and spiderlike before deciding against a knock. The hand rested for a while against the door panel, spiderlike again, as if trying to catch vibrations from within. His right hand remained pressed against his flank, grasping something chunky, with a long, cylindrical snout.

Even in the extremity of fear, Bunting felt a spark of excitement. The man actually had a silenced pistol! His heart bumped, then relief jolted through him as Lyfeldt shrugged and turned away.

And then Porter Bunting sneezed.

Flinching back into hiding, he heard Lyfeldt padding toward him. To his horror, Lyfeldt paused at the end of the corridor, close enough to touch. Bunting could smell the dampness of the man's freshly washed hair.

Lyfeldt was peering down the stairs. Next he would turn to retrace his steps and see Bunting cowering beside the door leading to the balcony.

A devout coward, Porter Bunting never knew how he did it. Lumbering forward, with a shriek of mingled terror and trapped rage, he shoved Lyfeldt down the stairs. The man gasped and hurtled the first ten treads without touching them, struck the wall at the angle of the flight, and rolled and crashed to the bottom.

There was a long silence. Wincing at the expected shot, or the sight of Lyfeldt climbing back, Bunting peeped over the rail.

Lyfeldt was a cross on the floor of the lobby, the mark of his own point of death, head bent at an impossible angle, gun flung a few feet from his flared fingers.

"Thank God," sobbed Bunting.

Later he began to amend his reaction.

Detective Subur, British-trained and -accented, had courtesy he was deploying like a weapon. Beside him, pale and upset, Mokerjee, manager of the Tropique, kept darting glances at Porter Bunting as if unable to believe what he saw.

"Lyfeldt was a criminal," Bunting repeated wearily. "What they call a hit man—a professional killer."

Subur frowned in a good facsimile of puzzlement. "With great respect, sir, no. Mr. Lyfeldt was a salesman. He sold electrical goods. This I know, because until recently I was in our Immigration Department.

"Mr. Lyfeldt made several visits, and I personally checked his docu-

ments. He held full accreditation from our Board of Trade."

Bunting sneered and shook his head. "Cover!"

"I doubt it, sir." Subur might have been discussing cricket statistics. "Mr. Lyfeldt sold several consignments of radios to my uncle. They were shaped like fruits, as it might be—apples, bananas, oranges. Good radios. I assure you, the late lamented gentleman was a salesman."

"But he had a gun!"

Subur's smile was gleaming white, a positive sunburst. "Not exactly, sir. Not quite. It was a device for spraying the throat and bronchial passages and so forth. Mr. Lyfeldt suffered from breathing difficulties. It may have escaped your attention, but our climate is ever so very slightly humid. Poor Mr. Lyfeldt found it oppressive. Hence the sprayer. No known caliber—not a firearm of any form."

Mokerjee blurted out, "Wicked lies! This man had arguments with Mr. Lyfeldt—burst into his bedroom and shouted at him."

"Exactly," Detective Subur murmured.

"I used his shower, that's all!"

"But it was not your room." Subur raised a languid, pink-palmed hand. "No matter. You were at odds with the deceased and, by your own admission, crept out at dead of night and in a stealthy, covert, one might say ambushing mode of conduct shoved him to perdition. Yes?"

"No! Well, in a way. No—he was hanging around outside my room!"

To Bunting's surprise, Mokerjee nodded agreement. "Mr. Lyfeldt wanted to speak to you. He was terribly worried you might dismiss him—end his employment."

Bunting mouthed feebly. "Fire him? I didn't know the man!"

"Except for killing him," Subur amended suavely.

"I've explained that."

Frowning judiciously, Subur commented, "You have told me many things and explained nothing. What is this about ending the deceased's employment?"

While Bunting gobbled helplessly, the manager burst out again. "Mr. Lyfeldt had a long chat with Mr. Trump, our nice English guest. After dinner.

"Then Mr. Trump went to catch his plane. Mr. Lyfeldt came to me, most agitated, asking if you were in your room, whether it was too late to disturb you. He had just learned that you had bought the Nadir Novelty Radio Company of New Orleans, and was anxious to apologize before you

discharged him for arguing with you over his room."

Head whirling, Bunting made a mosquito-shooing gesture. "This is lunacy! I wouldn't buy a radio firm!"

He stopped with an audible gulp. Detective Subur noted a guilty tremor and leaned forward. Cases involving mercurial, ill-disciplined aliens were always good for local headlines. This madman Bunting was about to confess.

Porter Bunting was remembering why he hadn't been pleased, right at the back of his mind, to meet Ronnie Trump. Itching powder, thumb-tacked chairs, short-sheeted beds. . .

The Last Trump had been a compulsive practical joker.



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Penn told Bailey he might have some important information. . .

A DEAL IN DUST



by **DALE L.
WALKER**

Jack Penn smelled like a frycook and I wouldn't want to eat where he worked. The effluvium of hot grease and onions that radiated from him was thick enough to slice with a spatula. Also, he dressed the part—a T-shirtful of belly hanging over the waist of white trousers. A hamburger and fries in white sneakers.

I saw him occasionally at Bronk's, the saloon on Fourteenth and Apple where night workers tend to congregate before heading home to the sack.

Bank guards, hospital workers, hack drivers, off-duty cops, and morning-newspaper people like me favor Bronk's—mainly because it's open, centrally located, and cheap. But people also like the proprietor-bartender, Leo Nagursky, a gnarly faced, fireplug-shaped former Chief Gunner's Mate who serves unwatered booze and cold beer in glassware you can see through.

Although I didn't know his name then, I talked with Jack Penn at Bronk's twice. The first time he was standing kneading his hands under the hot-air dryer in the men's room while I jabbed at the soap dispenser, trying to liberate a little of the latherless yellow slime that was clogging it.

"The Oilers took a bad licking from Pittsburgh Sunday, huh?" Penn said in my general direction.

"Huh?" I answered to his image in the mirror, identifying his odor and line of work.

"Why can't the damn Cowboys be the ones playing the Steelers instead of Houston?" he said wistfully.

An Oiler fan? *Here?* I thought. "Yeah," I said. "The Cowboys should have to play them."

With that and a quick glance at me in the mirror, he pushed through the door, leaving some of the spoor behind.

The second and last time I spoke to him I was sitting on one of Bronk's barstools, head propped on one hand, nursing a draft Bud and mindlessly watching a TV program called something like "Celebrity Challenge." It consisted of grown men and women, together with ungrown boys and girls—all of them stars of various small-bore TV shows—klutzing around an obstacle course of some kind. The course was so rudimentary Sidney Greenstreet could have breezed through it without breathing hard, but an adult sports announcer was ooh-ing and aah-ing and asking serious questions of the sweating celebs as if he was covering the Munich games. It was stupid and embarrassing. Naturally, I was fascinated with it.

"Hey, excuse me," a voice to my left said. "Are you Bailey? The Bailey that writes for the *Sentinel*?"

I swiveled my face on my palm to answer, but I knew who was talking to me. Sherlock used to leave Watson gaping by identifying people's trades by the calluses on their thumbs or the ink on their cuffs. My deductive reasoning is a lot simpler—a whiff of grease and onions equals frycook.

"I'm Bailey," I said to Penn. "How'd the Oilers do Sunday?"

"Huh?" He'd forgotten our previous conversation. "Oh, they beat hell out of the Bengals. What I wanted to say, though—I'd like to talk with you sometime. I read a story of yours and I might have something you'd be interested in."

I've been a police reporter too long—twenty-seven years all told—to make the mistake of wondering what a frycook could have to tell me that I'd be interested in. Some of the best tips I've ever had have been from complete strangers who saw my byline and called me. And since the *Sentinel* sometimes runs a little half-column mug shot of me with my choicer stories, I'm recognized in a bar now and then.

But I did make a mistake with Penn, now that I think back on it. If I had it to do over, I wouldn't have been so snappish. Maybe I was anxious to get back to the poor man's Olympics on TV—and maybe I'm getting old. You can't rewrite history.

"What do you mean, *might* have something I'd be interested in?" I said. "I'm Bailey, I'm here, you're there, start talking."

Penn looked me over and grinned. "Naw, the time ain't right," he said. He hoisted his schooner, his gullet worked up and down twice, and about four inches of beer slid down. He put the glass on the bar, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and said, "I just wanted to know what you look like in person. I'll see you around in here again and we'll have a big ol' talk."

Before I could say anything he slipped off the stool and walked to the door. He shot a salute at Brönk, who was standing at the door end of the bar, and walked out, his hands jammed into the pockets of his whites.

"Bailey?"

Rasmussen, my nominee for chief of the Riverton Police Department, and my top "informed source" on the force, was a dead giveaway. His voice had the melodious quality of one of those rock-polishing machines.

"Yes, Rasmussen, it's Bailey. Who else answers this phone? Joseph Pulitzer?"

"Hey, that's a real good one, Bailey. Anyway, we got a stiff. You takin' notes?"

"Yes, I'm takin' notes."

"O.K. The deceased is a white male, age twenty-six, five-nine, 185 pounds, brown hair, brown eyes, tattoo of the name 'Thelma' in a heart on the inside left forearm, tattoo of a dagger dripping blood and the words

'Crockett, Texas' on left bicep."

The tattoo descriptions caused something to click in my head. "How'd he get it?"

"Two big-caliber slugs. One in the head, the other in the neck."

"When and where was the body found?" It was almost five and I wondered whether our competition, the *Press*, Riverton's afternoon paper, already had the story.

"No more than two, three hours ago. A guard at the Glover Company—you know, that wholesale electronics place on Merchant and Silver—moved a big piece of cardboard in the alley and found the deceased under it. Guy'd been dead maybe eight hours."

"Got a name?"

"John Robert Penn. Maybe a transient. He was carrying a Texas driver's license, forty bucks in his wallet, and what looks like a payroll stub from the Cinderella Diner—that's a chili-and-ptomaine parlor on Eldorado near Fourteenth."

At the mention of the chili parlor something else went click. I asked a question I do not ordinarily ask.

"How was the guy dressed?"

"Dressed? I don't know. Hold on."

I hung on.

"Bailey?"

"Yeah?"

"The deceased had on white pants, a T-shirt, and white canvas shoes." Something went click-click-click and it wasn't the phone.

It was a slow day for local news and my story on the Penn murder was played for more than it deserved, page 1-B above the fold with a two-column head.

TEXAN MURDERED
ON SOUTH SIDE
Victim Identified.

The story contained everything I had been able to get. Penn had been dead nine to eleven hours when the Glover Company guard found him. That put the murder at around 4:00 A.M. No one had turned up who heard the shots or saw anything. I had phoned the Cinderella Diner and talked to Richard Hayes, the owner. He said Penn worked the four-to-

midnight shift the night before he was killed. Hayes said he couldn't account for what Penn did after he left work. I quoted him in my story.

"I don't know much about him," Hayes said. "He worked for me about two months—came in off the street and applied. I had a sign in the window. He said he was an experienced cook and he was. He was a good worker and very quiet. He liked to be called Jack."

Hayes said he knew nothing of Penn's after-work habits or friends. "Why somebody would want to bump him off is way beyond me," Hayes added.

This, plus the information that Penn had apparently not been robbed, that there was no sign of a struggle, and that the Riverton police had determined Penn had no close living kin, about summed up what I had. I did mention that the Merchant Street warehouse neighborhood, in one of the oldest sections of Riverton, was only a few blocks from Penn's fifty-dollar-a-month slum apartment, where he'd lived for a total of five weeks.

Naturally I reread clips of my stories in the *Sentinel* over the past five weeks, trying to get some idea of what Penn had read that made him want to talk to me. But the past couple of months had been lean—an embezzlement so picayune it had netted the culprit, a twenty-two-year veteran of the Riverton National Bank, less than \$800; a piece on the rising number of late-night armed robberies of convenience stores; an Op Ed column in which I pontificated, at my editor's insistence, on "senseless vandalism"—as if there's any other kind—using recent examples at Riverton College and one of our largest public parks; and a feature on the "suicide curve" on the Interstate south of town, which had claimed several lives so far this year.

There was a batch of other things, but they were unbylined pieces and Penn couldn't have known I'd written them.

"It would bug me too," Willis, my city editor, said. "He probably didn't have anything big to tell you, but who knows? When I was on the city beat an old lady stopped me outside the Mayor's office and gave me a tip that tore the lid off that favor-peddling operation a few years ago. Her son worked for a big construction company that had been awarded a fat contract even though it was a long way from low bidder on the job. The son told his mother what he overheard in the office, she told me, and I lit the fuse. You just never know."

"Thanks for that comforting example," I said.

Willis smiled out of the corner of his mouth, slopping paste on several fragments of a story he had edited, scissored into fragments, and was reuniting.

"Seriously—maybe you should work it the other way. Get as much information on Penn as you can and try to fit that to what you wrote over the last couple of months."

I said, "Now I know why you get that big paycheck every week."

The *Sentinel*, being a class newspaper, has a class "library." This consists of a wooden cigarette-scarred bookcase by the wire room containing a set of encyclopedias once offered a volume a week by a local supermarket; a gazetteer so old Istanbul is still called Constantinople; a half dozen vintage copies of *Playboy*, their covers and contents disintegrating and their centerfolds long ago appropriated by the chief photographer for scholarly study in his darkroom; three *World Almanacs*, the latest three years old; an unabridged dictionary that will give a hernia to anyone who moves it from its shelf; a copy of Fowler's *Modern English Usage* which has never been opened, much less used; an *Associated Press Stylebook* decorated with linking coffee-cup rings; a thermos bottle, two or three empty sacks that once contained the lunches of our brown-bagging wire editor, and six styrofoam cups, containing the sickening remains of coffee and cigarette butts.

The library does have one valuable thing, evidence of the fixation the newspaper business has on the newspaper business: the *Ayer Directory of Publications*. It is divided into states, then alphabetically into cities, then alphabetically under that every newspaper and periodical published in that city together with the circulation of each, when it was founded, who owns it, the address, the name of the editor, and a lot of other information in squint-producing eight-point type.

I looked up Crockett, Texas (pop. 22,415) and got the name of its paper, a daily called the *Chronicle*, whose editor was Charles Craddock. I swear—Charles Craddock of the *Crockett Chronicle*.

I called Craddock, introduced myself, and told him of Jack Penn's murder while he took notes on the typewriter. The Riverton PD, I said, had learned from the Crockett PD that Penn had no close living kin but that he had an ex-wife, Thelma Day, still living in Crockett. I wanted to talk to her.

"I'm leafin' through the phonebook while you're talkin'," Craddock

said. "Here's three Days. Let me check the City Directory." He came back a minute later and gave me her number.

"Bailey, I'd 'preciate your keepin' me posted on all this," Craddock said. "If they get Penn's killer call me up, day or night. Meantime, I'll scout around here and see if I come across anything on Penn you don't already know. Let's trade information. We ain't in competition and this story sure as hell beats the grand openin' of the John Deere store."

The phone rang a long time before she answered it, but when she did Thelma Day had one of these Deep-in-the-Heart-of-Takes-Us accents you always hear imitated but never believe. Believe it, she had it—also a very real ingenuousness. The Riverton Homicide people had already called her. She knew of Penn's death, but she didn't hesitate a split second before answering everything I asked and didn't seem to begrudge me the time despite the kids I could hear screaming in the background. Every once in a while she covered the mouthpiece of the phone to yell something at them.

The upshot of it was that she didn't know much—at least she didn't think so. She and Penn were married in the middle of his four-year hitch in the Navy. They had dated a few times in high school, and when he had come home after some sea duty out of San Diego she'd fallen in love with his swagger, his uniform, and his exotic stories of Japan, Guam, and Hawaii.

"You got to remember, I've never been farther out of Crockett than Houston," she explained. "All that adventure stuff just thrilled me right down to my socks."

Five months before he was due for discharge, Thelma had to call Penn in San Diego to inform him that his twenty-year-old sister Joann was dead. Joann was a student at Southeastern Texas State College, a small liberal arts school in Houston. She had jumped or fallen from the window of her fifth-floor dormitory room. The post-mortem revealed the presence of some kind of drug in her system and her death was ruled accidental, probably attributable to drugs.

Joann and her brother Jack had been very close. Their parents were both dead and Jack had sent part of his Navy pay to Joann to keep her in school. "She wasn't wild," Thelma Day said, "but nobody knew who she ran around with at that place."

Jack came home on emergency leave to bury his sister, then returned

to San Diego to finish out his enlistment. When he was discharged, things had soured between him and Thelma. She said he didn't seem to want to go to work, neglected her, and spent most of his time in Houston. "All he ever told me was that he had to find out what happened to Joann," Thelma told me. "We couldn't live on his musterin'-out pay and whenever he'd come back here from one of his trips to Houston, why, we spent most of the time argyin'."

They had been divorced six months ago and she hadn't seen him since.

"I got married again not long after our divorce went through," Thelma told me. "I guess you could say I'm the marryin' kind. Anyway, Ernie Day, my husband, he was a widower with three young kids—the ones you hear climbin' the curtains in the background. Ernie's got the Delco franchise down here and we're doin' just fine."

Thelma said she had no idea why Penn had come to Riverton and no idea why anybody would want to kill him. "Jack never did anybody no harm," she said with genuine sadness. "When Joann died he lost all of his ambition . . ." Her voice trailed off to a sigh.

I thanked her and told her I wished her and Mr. Day much happiness. I meant it. Before hanging up, I asked her if she had a photograph of Jack. She said she did and she would special-delivery it to me.

Next I called Jerry Quinn, Riverton's homicide lieutenant, and passed along the information Thelma Day had given me. The story she had told his people was virtually identical to what she'd told me. Quinn said they were checking into Joann Penn's death in Houston, hoping they could make some tie between that and Penn's coming to Riverton. He said that tossing Penn's two-room apartment had produced nothing significant—just his clothes and other personal stuff, a stack of magazines and paperback books, and some literature from Riverton College—no letters or notes or indication of any kind as to why or precisely when he had come to town, or what he had intended doing here. The college had no record of his attending classes and the literature found in his room was the common "Take One" variety of handout he'd probably picked up off a table in the registrar's office at the campus.

Penn had visited the campus at least once. Quinn's people had found a visitor's parking permit from Riverton College in the glove compartment of his 1973 navy-blue Pinto Runabout, along with a campus map. The car had been found in the parking lot behind his apartment house. It had Texas plates and 63,000 miles on the odometer.

I called Craddock in Crockett—still loving the combination—and gave him a summary of the Thelma Day and Jerry Quinn information.

“Do you think Penn came up there because he found out somethin’ about his sister’s death?” Craddock asked me.

“It’s possible, but I can’t think what it might be,” I said. “Thelma said Joann’s death was all Jack could think about.” I told Craddock our homicide investigators were looking into the situation at Southeastern Texas State and asked him if he could find out more details on Joann Penn’s death or what Jack had been doing on the campus.

“I’ve never been on that campus,” Craddock said, “but I know where it is. I think I’ll mosey on over there early tomorra, ’bout when it opens. I’ll call you if I get anythin’.”

I reread my clippings. Penn had apparently visited the Riverton campus at least once, picking up the literature and keeping the visitor’s parking permit they’d given him at the gate. I had written of the college only once in the past couple of months, researching my “senseless-vandalism” column. Several faculty offices in the chemistry building had been broken into, a ton of file-cabinet paper had been dumped and strewn on the floor, desks had been ransacked, and a word resembling “hog” in two-foot-high letters had been spray-painted on a wall outside the offices. The campus police had investigated and reasoned that the vandals may have been searching for exams but, failing to find any, were content to render the offices unusable for a few days.

Our education editor, Connie Oates, had followed up on the vandalism incident but the campus police had turned up nothing new in the month since it had happened.

I wondered if Penn might have been the vandal. If so, what had he been searching for? Why would he bother to take along a spray can of paint if he had been looking for something? Nothing fit.

My second-day story on the Penn murder, which ran on Friday, was a routine recap of the case together with the oddments of information I had gathered from Lieutenant Quinn. For the customarily skimpy Saturday edition I wrote a brief Riverton Police Department Homicide Investigators Report No New Leads type of story and let it go at that.

Willis was in an editor’s conference when I dropped my no-new-leads story into his wire basket along with some other non-Penn copy. At the adjacent desk, Tanner, the Assistant City Editor, was working over the

late edition of the *Press* with an outsized pair of shears, clipping the stories he would have city-side reporters follow up on.

Tanner smokes cigarettes himself, but he's devoted to my pipe. He caught a whiff of my new aromatic tobacco and gave me his daily pipe crack. "What are you smoking now," he asked without looking up, "fudge?"

To acknowledge Tanner's jokes in any way is to encourage him, so I said, "Tell Willis I'm on my way down to see Hayes, the guy who runs the diner where Penn worked. And tell him I want to talk to him about my Sunday story."

The only thing Hayes could add to what he had already told me on the phone was that Penn had seemed unusually relaxed when he reported to work at four o'clock on the afternoon before he was killed.

"He wasn't the relaxed type," Hayes said, setting a cup of coffee in front of me. The Cinderella Diner owner was large and hairy in a loud Hawaiian-print sportshirt and wrinkled slacks; a gap-toothed man with a sidewall haircut. "Jack didn't talk much and we didn't socialize. He was a good cook and a hard worker but his mind was always somewhere else. When he came in here last Tuesday, though, he seemed—well, *looser*. We even talked a little and had some lemon meringue pie and coffee. I left at five like always, and that was the last time I ever saw him."

Hayes said the pie-and-coffee talk was about football and the weather. He said he'd never asked Penn what he was doing in Riverton. Judging from the fading lettering, the fly specks and the thumb marks on his Help Wanted sign now in the diner window again, I could see that Hayes was used to hiring people who didn't stick around to make a career of it.

Leo Nagursky, the "Bronk" of Bronk's saloon, is an ex-Navy gunner and said the only time he really talked to Penn was the first time he saw the Texan at the bar.

"He was a draft-beer drinker," Leo said, "so I set up a few on the house for a new customer. I knew he was Navy and not out long. Those were regulation whites he wore. We talked a little Navy, a little football—he was a big Oilers fan—and that was it. I don't pry, so I didn't learn much about him except he was a Texan, did a four-year hitch out of Dago, and made commissary third—that's a cook—before he got out. I asked him if he'd thought about shipping over—you know, re-enlisting.

He said he had thought about it but right then he had something more important to do. I remember wondering how important it could be to work in a diner somewhere so far from home."

On Saturday morning I stopped at a doughnut shop on the way to the *Sentinel* and picked up a pint of black coffee and three plain doughnuts to go.

My mail included the photo Thelma Day had promised to send and I made my way to my desk. There, tepid coffee and sinkers at elbow, I pecked out a lead for the Penn story I had in mind for our fat Sunday edition. I didn't have much in the way of news nor any way of knowing what the rest of the day would bring, so I started out:

No one knows why Jack Penn, a burly ex-sailor from Crockett, Texas, came to Riverton five weeks or so ago. No one knows why he came here and, as yet, no one knows—except his killer—why he was murdered here in the early-morning hours last Wednesday.

No one heard a noise and no one reported seeing anything unusual, but at about 4:00 or 5:00 A.M., in a Merchant Street alleyway, someone sent two .38-caliber bullets crashing into Jack Penn's skull and neck.

Next I recapped Penn's Navy background, his short-lived marriage, the tragic death of his sister from a drug-connected leap or fall from her dormitory window, Penn's disappearance from Crockett, his appearance in Riverton, and his employment at the diner. I quoted Thelma Day, Richard Hayes, Lieutenant Quinn of Homicide, and Leo Nagursky.

I took the unfinished story over to Willis and told him I intended ending it by telling of my own experience with Penn at Bronk's saloon, the cryptic remark he made to me about something I had written recently, my clipping search, and my idea that there might be a connection between Joann Penn's death at the college in Houston and Jack Penn's coming to Riverton and his visits to Riverton College.

Willis speed-read the copy and flipped it back to me. "You got any new art?" he asked. We had used Penn's driver's-license mug with the second-day story.

"I got a snapshot wedding picture of Thelma and Jack Penn," I told him. "It's usable." Actually it was better than that. It was possible some-

body would recognize him from it and come up with some information.

Before getting back to the typewriter, I put a call in for Charlie Craddock. He was in Houston but expected back shortly. I left a message.

By the time I finished talking to Craddock this time around I had grown to like him a hell of a lot, and we promised to get together, either there or here, some time soon.

He had left the *Chronicle* in the hands of his managing editor on Friday and had spent the better part of the day on the Southeastern Texas State campus, where he had come up with two important pieces of information—one, Joann Penn had died with a familiar drug in her bloodstream: PCP, the much-publicized “angel dust,” and, two, Penn had made a nuisance of himself on campus questioning students, security officers, faculty members, and anybody else he could collar, trying to find out who the drug dealers were.

Craddock had met a couple of students who had talked with Penn. They had told Penn Joann and some of her friends were involved in drugs—either as buyers or pushers. The students said it was possible Penn had picked up a lead, although they doubted it and refused to supply any names to Craddock.

As for the PCP, the students said it was a glut on the market.

“Now you know what the spray-paint was all about,” Craddock said, “and you’re makin’ out of all this the same thing I am. You got a pretty good story for your Sunday paper and so have I. Do you have a way of runnin’ a check at Riverton College for anybody that might have transferred there from Southeastern? If you find somebody you can bet your entire butt that Penn found him too.”

I told Charlie I’d be back in touch in a few hours.

The edges came together a little after that conversation. In newspaper work you need to know about drugs and I have a file drawer full of dope data: government pamphlets, clips from scientific journals, and wire-service copy. PCP is nothing new. It was originally an animal tranquilizer and is still used by some veterinarians. Its chemical name is phencyclidine hydrochloride. It can be a powerful central-nervous-system depressant or stimulant, depending on the amount taken. It’s very versatile: you can eat it, inject it, snort it, or sprinkle some on tobacco, grass, oregano, or mint leaves and smoke it.

What it can do to you is equally versatile. You can get simple hallucinations, a hard-to-describe spaced-outedness, or a schizoid psychosis. You can claw your own eyes out, you can open your veins with a razor blade and feel no pain, or you can kill somebody or yourself.

Leaping from a window fits a PCP pattern and Joann Penn's death was not the first such manifestation of it. The stuff first came into use in this country in the early 1950s as a surgical anesthetic but its potential for horror removed it from the market in 1965.

Two other PCP facts: Anybody who can read a recipe and get the ingredients can make it by the tubful. And among its nicknames, besides "angel dust" and "rocket fuel," is one I hadn't known or remembered until Craddock reminded me of it. PCP is also known as "hog."

Connie Oates, as I mentioned, is our education reporter, a big, lovely woman who's married to the *Sentinel* and can find page-one news in a PTA meeting. It was Saturday and getting late—not a good time to find out anything on a college campus—but Connie managed to get hold of a friend who works in the Riverton College personnel office. The idea was to run a check, as Craddock had suggested, on the faculty, starting with the Chemistry Department, to see if anybody had been hired recently from Southeastern Texas State.

Ten minutes later, Connie's friend called. Nothing. And an hour after that with a report on the overall faculty. Also nothing.

"Let's put it together, Bailey," Connie said to me, seeing my hangdog expression. "The vandalism was in the Chemistry Department. The graf-fito was sprayed on the wall outside the faculty suite. It was a warning of some kind. If not, why didn't Penn or whoever did it just spray some person's name on the wall? Or something right over the person's desk, instead of in neutral territory in the hall? Penn apparently didn't find what he was after. He spilled everybody's papers on the floor, ransacked all the desks, and sprayed 'hog' on the wall because he wanted the person to know he was after him."

I told you she's good. She reminds me of Colleen Dewhurst.

I put in my two cents. "O.K. But you've checked the faculty out. Why was Penn searching the chemistry offices? Because back in Houston he'd found out who his sister's PCP dealer was and he trailed him here to Riverton College. He had to know the dealer had something to do with the Chemistry Department here—otherwise why would he single it out?"

Why would he bring along a spray can and write 'hog' on the wall?"

Connie nodded. "Penn knew he'd flush his dealer out with that word. It was unlikely that more than one person would know what it meant."

"But if not a chemistry professor, who?" I asked.

Connie picked up one of my doughnuts and took a bite.

"Maybe a T.A.," she said.

"What's a T.A.?"

"A teaching assistant. They're usually graduate students, working on a Master's or a Doctorate. They help grade papers, assist in the classroom, even substitute teach once in a while."

"Do they get an office?"

"No, but they have access to the office of the professor they work for. They file stuff, use his or her office to grade exams, and like that."

"Can you get your friend to run a check on the T.A.'s in chemistry?" I asked her.

She was already dialing.

There's a whole list of things you aren't supposed to be able to get from a student's record, but Connie Oates got what I needed.

The T.A.'s name was Albert Moorehead. He was from Houston, he had done his undergraduate work at Southeastern Texas State and had completed some work towards his Master's Degree in chemistry when he left Texas about nine months ago—five months after Joann Penn's death and very shortly after Jack Penn had returned home from the Navy to begin his search for Joann's dealer. Moorehead showed up at Riverton College not long after he decamped from Houston, transferred his credits, paid the out-of-state tuition, and got a job as a T.A. for one of the chemistry professors.

Connie squeezed Moorehead's Riverton address from her personnel friend and I called Jerry Quinn with that and the rest of what I had learned from the stunning Connie Oates and the man whose number I now dialed.

Rasmussen called a couple of hours before deadline. "Quinn told me to call you, Bailey. Moorehead bugged out a few days ago. His apartment is empty and the professor he worked for says he hasn't seen him since last Tuesday. That would be the day before Penn got iced. Are you gettin' all this down?"

"I'm gettin' it, I'm gettin' it," I said.

"Quinn said to tell you the make we ran on Moorehead turned up some interesting stuff, including a couple of busts for dealing down on the border."

"Anything else?" I asked.

"Nothing. Except Quinn said to tell you we got an all-points out on Moorehead. He probably won't be hard to find."

"Tell Quinn I said thanks." I was about to hang up.

"Hey, Bailey, let me ask you something. Why did Quinn ask *me* to call you on this stuff? Do you think he's on to me and you?"

"Forget it, Rasmussen," I said comfortingly. "It's just a coincidence."

Willis ran my story on Sunday morning under the nameplate and a six-column head. It made no attempt to convince the reader that the murder of Jack Penn was solved. It just presented the facts and a little speculation from the mouths of people such as Lieutenant Quinn of Homicide.

I called Charlie Craddock from home on Sunday and we compared notes again. I read him my story and he read me his and we fawned all over one another.

He said that after he put his paper to bed at midnight and went home he couldn't get to sleep. He kept his wife up half the night telling her about the case. "I'll tell you somethin', Bailey, I haven't done that in more years than I can remember: What'd you do after deadline?"

I told him I took Connie Oates out to a big dinner. I explained about Connie and said, "I'll tell you something, Charlie, the more I look at her the more I see Colleen Dewhurst."

"Colleen Who-hurts?" he asked.

"Forget it, old friend," I said. "I'll tell you all about her and a bunch of other lies when I come down to buy you a drink. And we'll also lift a glass in memory of Jack Penn—he tried to do good."



The mountains had a way of exacting a price for ignorance and carelessness; just as the city did . . .

DEATH RATTLE



by **STEPHEN WASYLYK**

At dawn, Drake was up and driving, dressed in heavy boots and light-weight slacks and jacket, leaving the motel and heading toward the creek beside which Gruber camped on his annual fishing trip.

He crossed a low stone bridge and followed the road as it rose toward the crest of the prehistoric wrinkle of land that formed the side of a small valley. At the top he maneuvered the car off the road and deep into the woods, unlocked the trunk, and pulled the rifle from under the lip of the

rear deck where it was held by heavy magnets sewn into the case and where it was out of sight when the trunk was opened. The rifle had started out as a standard 30.06 but Drake had replaced the stock with one custom-made for himself, incorporating more drop than usual and specially worked hand grips. Dropping three shells into his jacket pocket, he started through the trees along a narrow hiking trail.

He hadn't gone twenty feet when he stopped, startled by the dry rattle.

Coiled in the grey dappled morning shadows, a large timber rattler contested his passage, its coloring blending with the dust and dead leaves.

Drake's mouth twisted. A tall man with long blond hair and a square, bony face, he had few extreme dislikes and feared little, but rattlesnakes fell into both categories. Looking at the coiled snake brought to mind the feel of the dry scales and the powerful muscles beneath. His palms grew wet. Still sluggish from the cool night, the snake regarded Drake with malevolent eyes, its tongue flickering.

"Seems like they come in cycles and the woods are full of them this summer," the kid in the motel had said. "You gotta be careful."

Drake stepped back and set the rifle aside. He searched until he found a flat heavy rock and, from high over his head, smashed it down on the coiled rattler, driving the triangular head deep into the dust with a feeling of satisfaction.

The body writhed for long minutes before it was still.

Drake picked up the rifle and continued, his cold eyes searching the ground before him.

The trees grew thin, then opened to a wild meadow that was the result of a long-ago fire from which only a few trees had recovered. Below, to his left, curls of mist rose from a small creek. Drake left the ridge, angling downward, working his way around patches of dense brush.

He pushed his way down the hillside until the little valley opened before him and Gruber's camper and tent were in sight. There was no movement there. Drake looked for a place of concealment, not only from the creek but from anyone hiking along the crest of the hill. The woods were awake now, birds singing and unseen small animals making rustling sounds in the brush.

Its needles long since dried and brown, showering down when he touched them, a tall pine had become victim to a storm and its roots had pulled up the earth as it fell, leaving a cavity now almost completely covered with weeds and coarse grass.

The natural foxhole was ideal for the short time he'd need one.

Remembering the rattler, Drake used the barrel of the rifle to probe the grass thoroughly. Satisfied, he avoided a large patch of nettles, lowered himself to his stomach, and thrust the rifle through the tall weeds toward the campsite along the creek. Above and to his left, the dead roots of the tree loomed high, while in back of him trees and scrub brush concealed him from the ridge. Settled down into the pit, he couldn't be seen by anyone not standing almost on the rim of the hole.

He peered through the scope of the rifle, making delicate adjustments until he could see the campsite clearly and sharply. There was still no movement. Gruber's camper and the small tent beside the stream could have been an idyllic setting for a photo extolling the benefits of the great outdoors.

He checked the rifle again and began to take deep breaths. When the time came to shoot, he couldn't afford to be anything but relaxed. With the trial next week, Shelbrook wouldn't like it if he failed.

He glanced at his watch. Gruber was a little late arising this morning.

Lying motionless in the heat of the rising sun, insects buzzing around him, Drake was suddenly aware that his mouth was dry. He grimaced. He should have brought a canteen. And insect repellent. He was getting careless—but, then, he hadn't expected Gruber to oversleep.

He was lying perfectly still, his left hand cradling the rifle, his right curled casually around the stock, when he felt movement along his left leg.

He stopped breathing. His mind told him it could be any kind of small animal. His senses told him it was not. A heavy rope seemed to be rippling across his legs.

Holding his body rigid, Drake had to bite his tongue to keep from screaming.

Down on the creek bank, a grey-haired man with a heavy belly, wearing an undershirt, slid out from under the small tent and headed toward the creek.

Drake closed his eyes and willed himself not to move. He could imagine he felt the broad belly plates digging as the reptile crossed his legs.

The movement stopped but he could still feel the weight alongside his right calf.

The man below returned and pulled a small propane stove from the rear of the camper.

Drake's eyes were still glued to the scope. He had only to move the crosshairs a trifle and squeeze the trigger, but he knew the sudden jar and noise would startle the snake and bring on a strike.

He cursed silently. The sun beat down. An ant crawled across his hand. Birds sang in the woods, darted and swooped overhead. His thirst mounted. Most of his weight was on his left side, and his ribs and muscles began to ache. Drake resisted the desire to leap to his feet and run. There was no way he could move quickly enough. The uprooted tree to his left prevented him from rolling away from the snake; and he couldn't move his legs to spring ahead or back.

The sun climbed higher.

The man beside the creek was working at the stove, preparing breakfast. Foreign to the forest, the odor of coffee drifted up the hillside.

Drake fought down an impulse to turn his head, to look at what was beside his leg. He knew that if he saw that triangular head so close nothing could keep him from leaping to his feet.

The snake moved. Drake felt it curling on itself.

Hearing a slithering whisper, he shifted his eyes. Some feet in front the tall weeds wavered as something moved toward him, something hidden in the grass, and suddenly it appeared only a few feet in front of him and coming right at him.

It was the largest rattler he'd ever seen. Evidently headed for the hole Drake was in, the snake paused as it caught his body heat, its tongue flicking rapidly.

It was so close the deep pits under the eyes stood out with startling clarity, so close he could count the scales, so close the shadow of the rifle barrel fell across it.

Drake understood then. Somewhere under that tangled mass of roots was a den and, without thinking, he had moved into the rattlers' front yard. Examining the depression hadn't meant a damn thing. He should have known better, picked a more open spot. He should have remembered from his youth how things were in the mountains, how wild things behaved.

The flat eyes stared into his. Blood running cold, ice forming painfully deep inside his gut, he wanted to let go of the rifle, throw himself backward, and run.

He now had one snake coiled against his leg and another staring him in the face. Boxed in, he thought, as if it had been planned.

His stomach tightened, his nerves beginning a thin screaming that seemed to be nowhere yet everywhere inside.

Below, Gruber had donned a bright red shirt and was busy eating breakfast.

Neither snake moved as the sun rose higher.

Drake squeezed his eyes tightly shut. He couldn't escape with his body so he escaped with his mind, down the long dark tunnel of memory. He relived his days as a shoeless boy in the mountains, long before he grew up and met Shelbrook; the days when all he hunted were the deer, the bear, and the small running game of the forest. He had learned to shoot well because shells were expensive and each shot counted. If he missed he often went hungry.

And he had been smart enough in those days to know how to live in these mountains but the years had cost him that wisdom, and the mountains had a way of exacting a price for ignorance and carelessness just as the city did.

And then had come the war, and the targets became men. And after the war there was Shelbrook, with money to pay for that skill with the rifle, because Shelbrook knew there were always men who desired the death of other men and were willing to pay for it. And none of it made any difference to Drake because he told himself that each day, each hour, each minute, somewhere in the world men justified killing other men in the name of religion or politics or hate or greed—and if he did it for money he was no better or worse than any of them.

He had only contempt for someone like Gruber who would testify next week because he felt he had to testify, who would gain nothing for himself in taking the witness stand and, even though he had to be aware that he couldn't be allowed to tell his story, was still fool enough to come up here to fish when he should have been in a guarded room somewhere.

The fierce ache in Drake's cramped muscles brought him back to where he was.

The rattler had coiled upon itself defensively and its head was slowly weaving, its forked tongue darting, its tail buzzing sporadically. It was puzzled by this warm-blooded, unmoving thing before it, uncertain as to whether it represented danger.

Flying insects, attracted by the film of perspiration that covered Drake's body, crawled over him, bit freely through his thin slacks and returned to bite again. Unable to move, to scratch, Drake felt his skin was afire.

His face and hands were smarting from the sun and his left arm had become numb.

The heat, the thirst, the insect bites, and the fear piled up and for a moment he felt himself sagging into a pit of horror from which he could emerge only as a madman. He closed his eyes and clamped his jaws shut so tightly his teeth hurt.

Below, Gruber was washing his breakfast dishes in the creek.

Drake calculated the odds. The snake alongside him would not move. Nestled against his warm leg, it had no reason to move. What the rattler in front of him would do was questionable. It represented the bigger threat because any bite would be in Drake's face, arms, or upper torso and thus more deadly.

The feeling grew that he would *have* to move.

The longer he lay here the more numb his body would become, so that when he did call on his muscles he would be slow to react. He might have waited too long already.

If he could get rid of the rattler in front of him first and take his chances on the one alongside his leg—

Drake held his breath, knowing that if the snake chose to strike it would be too fast for the eye to follow, with no way to dodge or avoid it.

His cramped muscles screaming in protest, he suddenly snapped the rifle barrel to his left, batting away the rattler before it could move while he hurled himself backward, thrusting the butt of the rifle hard toward where he felt the snake along his leg would be.

He felt nothing as the butt of the rifle thrust the snake away and he rolled and smashed down at the head frantically, one blow flattening it against the dry earth.

Dragging the rifle, he scrambled out of the pit for a few yards and knelt, shuddering, his chest heaving, gulping great draughts of air through his open mouth.

The snake he had batted away had disappeared. The one he had killed still writhed slowly.

Kneeling at the edge of the pit, clutching his rifle for support, Drake felt a weakness wash over him as the tension within him faded.

Below, Gruber was packing away his propane stove.

Still time, thought Drake.

He took a deep breath and lifted the rifle, the crosshairs centered on

Gruber's chest. Even after his experience with the snakes, they held steady.

His finger took up the slack of the trigger.

It might have been nothing more than the harsh clarity of the morning light, but through the scope Gruber emerged as not just a target but a man, a weary-looking middle-aged man with a coarse face and a protuberant stomach who meant nothing to Drake, and it seemed to Drake that killing him would be a waste of time and ammunition. It would accomplish nothing, and the world would go on as it always had.

He lowered the rifle. To hell with Shelbrook, he thought. Let him get someone else.

Gruber picked up a fishing rod and disappeared downstream.

Drake watched him go almost with relief, aware suddenly of a burning and stinging in the calf of his right leg and the tension and fear came back, accompanied now by a despair and a sickness in the pit of his stomach. Since he had felt nothing immediately, he had assumed he had been faster than the snake.

He raised his pant leg carefully.

The side of his calf was a reddish patch of fine scratches and his eye fell on the smashed and crushed center of the greyish green cluster of nettles before him. He had rolled right through them.

Nettles, he thought. He felt a desire to throw his head back and laugh, to let his relief echo from the walls of the little valley. He shook his head. *Nettles.*

He started back toward his car, walking quickly.

His leg began to throb. He stopped several times and rubbed it gently. By the time he reached the car his leg felt so heavy he could hardly move it, and as he stowed the rifle in the trunk a sudden weakness made him clutch the car for support.

Tenderly he rubbed his leg. Damned nettles, he thought. Must have some kind of poison to them.

He drove, headed back for the motel, light-headed now, a nausea riding in his stomach as he followed the road down toward the creek. The car wove erratically. Several times he brought it back to the road with great effort.

When the road reached the foot of the hillside, it turned almost at a right angle across the low stone bridge. Drake didn't make it. The car continued straight, plunging through the underbrush and teetering for

a moment on the edge of the bank before plunging into the shallow water.

Several hundred yards away, Gruber heard the crash, dropped his fishing rod, and ran toward the sound. When he reached the wreck, Drake had pulled himself clear and was lying on the steep bank, his clothing soaked and one pant leg riding high. He was pale, his breathing quick and shallow, and as Gruber ran toward him the first thing he noticed was Drake's bare leg. He stared. He was no doctor but he didn't have to be. He had been an outdoorsman all his life and he recognized what he saw.

No longer concealed by the multitudinous nettle scratches on Drake's leg, the marks of twin fangs were centered in a purple swelling.

Gruber swore and fumbled for the snake-bite kit he had learned to carry long ago, his fingers trembling as he injected the antivenin, sliced open the fang marks, and applied the suction cup.

To do what he could was something he owed any man, but as he worked he couldn't escape the feeling that he somehow owed this one something more.

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The blonde had made a small fortune in phony insurance claims . . .

A CASUAL CRIME



by **DAN MARLOWE**

The snapshot was of a blonde whose hair was long and casual-looking. She was wearing shorts and a halter, showing that she liked to dress casually too. "Nice," I said, handing the photograph back to Burk Larson, chief investigator for the Argo Insurance Company.

"Nice!" Larson snorted. "I want her in prison, understand? She's cost Argo a fortune in the past five years."

"She must've started young."

"She did, but she's never been anything less than a professional." There was a note of respect in Larson's voice. "Last week was the first time we ever had enough on her to take her to court, even, and then she walked away with a big smile."

"She must be a wonder to have you calling for help, Burk," I remarked lightly.

"I'll tell you just how much of a wonder," he said grimly. "Five years ago she fell in the lobby of a Chicago theater and threatened to sue. Eventually, she signed a release and settled out of court. A year later her husband of ten days drowned at Atlantic City and she collected ten thousand dollars on a new policy on his life. The following year, a fancy dress shop she was running in Los Angeles went up in flames and we were holding the bag for another fifteen thousand. Early this year we had to make good for an expensive diamond necklace she reported stolen."

I had been doing some figuring. "It averages out to twelve or thirteen thousand a year, Burk. With her looks, she could make more as a model. Sure it isn't legitimate?"

"That's only what she's cost Argo," he emphasized. "She's into half a dozen other companies too."

"What did you have her up before the judge on?"

"Check cashing. She cashed thirty thousand dollars' worth of bad checks we're stuck with."

"The bad check, the evidence to prove the crime, is always right there to convict the passer," I said. "How did she get off the hook?"

"She passed all the checks in supermarkets belonging to the Silver Star chain, which we insure against loss." Larson shook his head. "I thought their system was foolproof. They won't accept a check unless they have a Silver Star identification card, and the cards don't come easily. The applicant has to fill out a detailed questionnaire, give bank references, have a photograph taken, and give a thumbprint. Then the chain takes a couple of weeks to check everything out before issuing the card."

"And she beat the system? The only way she could have done that was to make a phony identity stand up under the credit investigation."

"No. She used her own name and her own signature."

"And she walked away?" I said incredulously.

"It was my fault," Larson said sheepishly. "With her past record, I thought we had her cold. I even offered to put in a word for her with the judge if she'd return the money, but she just laughed in my face."

"What defense could she possibly have had?"

"The oldest in the world—she claimed that someone else was using her name."

"But with the evidence that you had—!"

"As I said, I was overconfident." He rubbed his jaw in embarrassment. "She agreed that the signatures on the checks *looked* like hers, and that the photo of the woman on the ID card *looked* like her. But she said that the thumbprint on the application wasn't hers—and it wasn't."

I whistled.

"Yes, I know," he said uncomfortably. "Why didn't I check it before we went to court? Because I was so sure. . . ." His voice trailed away. "And she'd always been a lone wolf. It never occurred to me that she'd have an accomplice, someone whose thumbprint she could use on the application. The jury took about fifteen seconds to find her not guilty."

"Did you try to run a make on the accomplice's print?"

"Of course. We sent copies to the FBI in Washington and to the California Identification Bureau in Sacramento. Those are the only single-print files that amount to anything, but they couldn't match up a thing."

"So what do you want from me?"

"She'll try something else, and when she does, I want you gumshoeing so close that you can smell her perfume. I'll pay five thousand for evidence that'll put her away. And I'd put another thousand on the barrelhead if I knew how she conned us this time."

I picked up the woman's photo again. She certainly did look casual against the background of the other lightly dressed shoppers. "Judging by the way everyone is dressed, this ID snap must have been taken in one of the stores near the beach," I said. "Are you still holding checks of hers not covered by the first indictment? Ones that you could still charge her with?"

"Have I ever! But she'd only use the same strategy."

I held out the photo for him to see. "The store was crowded when she made out the application. Even with her looks, no one would pay any particular attention to her. The cashier probably handed her a stamp pad and told her where to put her thumbprint. All she had to do was step behind one of the canned-goods displays."

"Step behind—?"

"She didn't have an accomplice," I said. "She worked it herself. Pick her up and run her through the mill again."

"Listen, you're—"

"And when she demands a fingerprint expert at her next trial, have him check her toeprints too. You can't see her feet in this photo, but you can bet she wasn't wearing combat boots."

I studied Burk Larson's astonished face. "And be sure you spell my name right on that six-thousand-dollar check."

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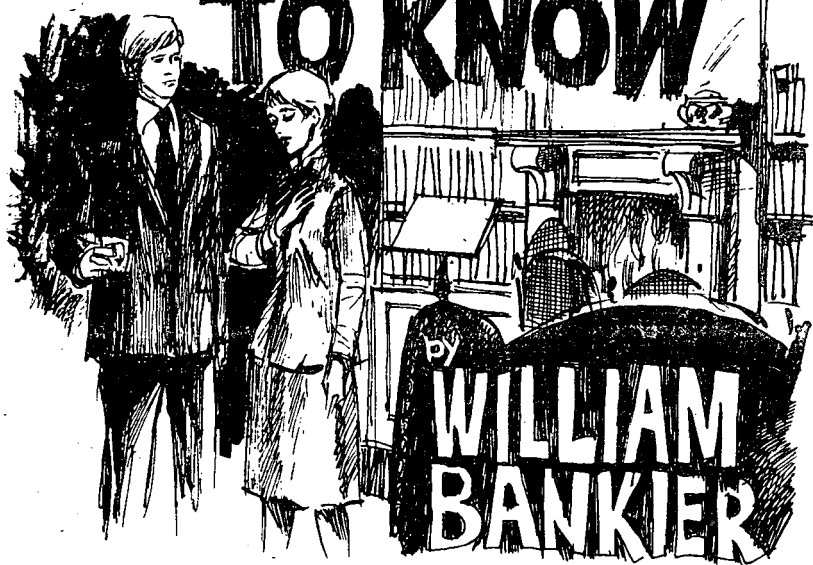
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If Cory didn't try May's plan he'd wonder for the rest of his life . . .

THE LAST ONE TO KNOW



He almost failed to recognize her. She looked different in grey light on Wimbledon Broadway from the way she had looked on BBC color television last night. But it was definitely May Stanstead, thinner in the face, the famous blonde perm abandoned now for a stylishly severe, mannish cut. Could she have lost this much weight overnight? No, obviously the panel show had been videotaped weeks or even months ago.

Their eyes met. A habitual winner with older women, Corey Keith

smiled and the famous actress gave him her trademark grin. He took a chance and spoke to her. "You were the best last night," he said.

"Oh, well. Thank you."

She was shorter than he had imagined, neat as a girl, chin tipped up at about his chest level, the collar of her suede jacket raised to frame her face, a wisp of black nylon scarf knotted at her throat. "Those comedians," he went on, "fighting to get in their ad-libs, they were O.K. But you came across with sweet intelligence."

Something happened in her eyes. She had been smiling professionally but now she focused on him for the first time, identifying what was confronting her. "That's very nice of you," she said. "Really it is." A gloved hand rested lightly on his arm.

Corey said, "I'm not drunk or anything—confronting you on the street like this. I have a reason."

"You don't need one."

"I mean, you don't know me but, in a way, I have a connection with you. I'm a member of the Hartfield Dramatic Society."

"Then you know my mother." Mrs. Jessica Stanstead was an honorary life member of the Hartfield Society. May was forever encountering locals who thus claimed a nodding acquaintance—but never one as potentially useful as this young man. Just how he might be useful May could not have said because, after weeks of discontent, the idea in her mind was still only half formed. "I'm afraid I haven't been to a Hartfield show lately, so I won't have seen you."

"You wouldn't anyway," Corey said. "I'm backstage painting flats, helping sling the lights—anything that doesn't inflict my Canadian accent on the poor audience."

"Canadian. I didn't think you were quite American."

"I'm not sure what I am. People in pubs here think I'm from Belfast." They were stuck here on this busy pavement. Heads kept turning in the flow around them. Corey took a stab. "Speaking of pubs, how about a drink? Have you got time?"

"I have, in fact." They began walking toward The Prince of Wales. "I was going to suggest the same thing."

She drank medium sherry. Corey lifted his pint of lager, conscious of the dried paint embedded around his fingernails. He could change into a good suit when he wasn't working but it took serious scrubbing with turps and a brush to eradicate the telltale brand of the house painter.

Women didn't usually seem to care but this one might be different. If she showed enough interest, Corey suspected he would be willing to dunk his fingers in acid to meet her standards.

She let him get her another drink. With it, her idea began to develop. It had to do with Jason, of course. As long as tedious, dependable, work-addicted Jason continued his annoying habit of waking up every day, there would be no room in May's life for Tony Bhajwa. May had spent one afternoon with Tony and it was enough to prove that making love could be an original experience. But if Jason found out, that would be that. No marriage, no money, not even the career assistance that came with having an influential husband at the BBC.

"I don't relax much any more," May said. "All I seem to do is work—read a new script every Wednesday, rehearse the next four days, then tape the episode on Monday. Tuesday off and we start again."

"That's what you get for having a successful series," Corey said. Actually, he thought her situation comedy, *Partners Sublime*, was a load of rubbish. It was in its third season on BBC1 and was beginning to struggle. Evidence of panic among the script writers was the fact that they had added a new character, a Pakistani waiter who justified the laugh-track by delivering boring lines in a stereotyped sing-song.

"Thanks," she said. "But it becomes very tiring. I did the panel show you saw last night to give myself some new exposure. What I'd *really* like is a good serious drama."

Corey drank deep, looking across the glass at her knitted brow, the sexy mouth distorted by stubborn thoughts. "Well," he said, "we've all got problems. How'd you like to paint other people's rooms for a living?" He showed her his mottled fingertips. "Look at that. My mother raised me for better things."

"I'm sure she did." She took hold of his hand and put one finger between her teeth and out again so quickly that nobody in the pub noticed. But Corey would never forget the audacity of it. The message was on the table and now it was up to him.

"What say we finish these and then whiz over to my place. It's just down on Worple Road."

"I thought you'd never ask," May said. "North Americans are supposed to be fast."

Corey Keith believed he knew all about women, married ones espe-

cially. The Hartfield Dramatic Society had a few female members in their forties, fading but still serviceable ladies whose husbands, for some reason, preferred not to know anything about their world of the theater. During his couple of years backstage, Corey had worked his way through these grass widows and found them satisfying, taken in limited seasons not exceeding three months. But May Stanstead was something else. He was cynical enough to appreciate that there was a histrionic side to her lovemaking, but even so . . .

He got out of bed and prepared coffee when she refused another drink. They sat propped up under a blanket and sipped the hot drink, eating the chocolate digestive biscuits he provided on two plates, everything apportioned evenly, the way he and his big sister used to share food back in Baytown. Corey used to lie in his room in a position that allowed him to look through both open doorways to watch his sister get undressed. She knew it too and never tried to move from his line of sight. Fortunately, she never told his mother—the old lady probably would have killed him.

May brushed crumbs from the sheet. "I'm wrecking your bed."

"And now," he said, "may I have the envelope for the best performance by a concubine?"

She took it as a compliment—which it was, for the most part. "You were incredible," she said. "Wow."

As they both dressed, Corey watched her. Her underwear was expensive stuff, the best he had ever seen. One of the off-putting things about the Dramatic Society ladies was their tragic "knickers," as they called them. But this woman looked like an illustration from a glossy magazine. Something, at last, was going overpoweringly right for Corey Keith.

"When am I going to see you again?" he asked.

"I'm afraid I have a very possessive husband. Possessive and jealous."

"I don't blame him one bit. But he isn't with us today. So why can't we work it again?"

"It's very complicated." She stood facing him, all buttoned up, the suede collar displaying her clever face. Neat girl, busy girl. "You'd better ring me."

He wrote down the number she gave him and agreed to call only at the specified time. Then he tried to kiss her goodbye and had to settle for a departing cheek.

By the time he was cleared to telephone two days later Corey wanted

May Stanstead so badly he was ready to do the proverbial naked crawl across acres of broken glass in dead of winter. She sounded on the phone as if she felt the same way. Unfortunately, she could not come to him. Her husband was out but he would be ringing her about something and she would have to be on hand. Would Corey like to come up the hill to the Village and see her for an hour? Do sharks like something to eat?

He jotted down the address, went outside, caught a 93 bus at the foot of the hill, and ten minutes later was at the door of an impressive house on South Side Common. May opened the door and drew him inside quickly. Something was wrong. She kissed him and he could feel the tension.

"Jason just telephoned. He'll be back sooner than I expected. You'll have to be ready to run."

Corey struggled with his disappointment. "Well, as Lord Nelson said at Trafalgar, 'Fleet, don't fail me now.'"

"I'm sorry. Come in. There's time for a drink."

"I can get a drink on the high street. I didn't come for a drink."

"I know." She pressed herself against him. "You poor thing—are you going to be all right?"

"I'll live." He followed her into a small library with an open fireplace burning wood. There were walls of books, maroon leather chairs, a Jacobean table. The place smelled and looked so fine Corey felt a strong attack of worthlessness. She gave him a drink. It was Scotch, which he hated, but he sipped it humbly without a word. She was in charge here.

"This is a very difficult situation, darling," she said. "And it isn't going to get any easier."

Corey finished his drink, set down the glass, and put both hands in his pockets. His fingertips burned from a recent scrubbing. "We'll have to meet down the hill," he said.

"No, no, my love, no." She came to him and stood with her wrists resting on his shoulders, her face turned up to his. The pleading expression was that of the classic heroine trying to reason with her animal man. "I've been with you once, Corey Keith—just once—and that was enough to show me that I can never go back to Jason. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

"I guess I do."

"I *hope* you do." She turned away and walked to the window where she became a slender silhouette in her tailored velvet suit. "Because I

am about to commit myself to a terrible decision."

"You'd be crazy to divorce him for me. I only made three thousand quid last year, and half the time I'm on the dole."

"I'm not talking about divorce. Jason would never consider it. And I agree with you—it would be crazy to throw away all this comfort." She turned to face him. "But we can have it both ways."

He wasn't stupid. "You're joking."

"I'm not. If something happened to Jason Hughes-Price, the noted television director, then Mrs. Hughes-Price, otherwise known as May Stanstead, would inherit this house and quite a lot of money. And she could settle down, after a not very respectable period of time, with the young man who knows how to make her feel very, very happy."

"You've got the wrong person, May." Corey sat down and waited while she refilled his glass. The Scotch was acceptable this time. "I paint rooms and move scenery. I'm not a hit man."

She knelt beside him. "I know you better than you know yourself. That's one thing. The other thing is, we don't need a hit man. Jason is so habit-ridden that killing him would be simple. I've thought of a way."

"I'm not sure I want to know." But he spoke too faintly, his mind clouded by the whisky and the sound of her voice and by his body's recollection of what had happened between them in the room on Worple Road. She began to explain her idea, leading him through the house by the hand.

It would happen on a Wednesday night. Jason always left the cast reading of the new script at 9:15 in order to be home in time to see Mid-Week Football on the telly. He was a fanatic. Sometimes May came with him, sometimes she had a drink with the other performers. On the proposed night she would stay behind.

In the kitchen, she demonstrated the faulty latch on the door to the back porch. "I've been after Jason to have new locks put on. There have been several robberies this winter in the Village." She showed how an intruder could force his way in, breaking the flimsy lock. She led Corey back to the library and indicated where he could stand just inside the doorway.

"When Jason comes in, all you do is hit him once with this." She lifted the heavy poker from its place beside the fire.

"I couldn't do it, May."

"It's foolproof. Nobody would ever connect you with this place. You'll

wear gloves, so there'll be no fingerprints. You can have the silver out so it looks as if Jason came in and caught you at it. Another local robbery—only this time the villain panicked." She watched his face for a few moments. "I guess you don't want us to continue as much as I do."

"I want that. But your husband—I don't even know him."

"If you did, you wouldn't hesitate. He's a dreadful man, you've no idea. I could tell you things—"

"Maybe you'd better."

May moved to the fire and knelt on an upholstered stool. She looked like a supplicant at confession. Corey stood beside her, listening, feeling the heat of the flames.

"He's one of those people," she said, "who takes pleasure in tormenting those weaker than himself. A manipulator. He likes to raise people up and then dash them down: It's the way he gets his kicks. He can't satisfy himself any other way. They all hate him at the studio—he'd never be missed."

Corey said nothing.

"I won't tell you what he does to me. But I can give you an example of how he treats others. There's a new boy in the series—his name is Tony Bhajwa."

"The Asian kid," Corey said. "The waiter. I've seen him—he isn't bad."

"He could be very good. He has talent. Jason cast him in this bit part and then expected Tony to lick his boots. But the boy isn't like that—he has a mind of his own. Well, the other day I heard Jason talking to one of the writers. He said he wants the wog dropped from the story." May turned a cold eye up to Corey. "The wog. Dropped. That's my dear, civilized Jason Hughes-Price."

They noticed the time and Corey had to make a run for it. He promised to think about the plan, but only that.

Two days later he was still trying for a complete night's sleep and, on the job, his hand was shaking so much he could not brush one color up against another. The weekend was hell. He tried drinking himself to sleep and only made himself sick. Afterwards he lay on the bed wondering what had happened to his uncomplicated life.

Growing up in Baytown, he had never expected to amount to a great deal. His father had gone as far as he could toward becoming a concert pianist. But you get no points for coming close and Herbert Keith ended

up as Herbie the sign painter, doing jobs like lettering the glass doors at the Bowl-O-Drome when his trembling hands would let him. He also played rehearsal piano for the Kiwanis variety shows which, to Corey's way of thinking, was slightly better than being put in a pit with a bear.

Blessed escape from the house of the domineering women awaited Corey as soon as he got together the money and the nerve to fly to Montreal. Two years there tending bar at the Sheraton-Mt. Royal and he was off again to England. Nothing but fun ever since, he told himself as he lay in the dark, wondering if he would have to make another dash for the loo. The room smelled of gin and beer. He managed to get up and fall around, putting the empty bottle and tins outside in the corridor.

With his head back on the pillow, he had a vision of the immaculate library up the hill. It could be his. Christ, what a thought. All he had to do was take part in May's adventure and he would end up with a woman who thought he was the greatest man in the world—and with a house like an ocean liner. The plan might work. It *could* work!

He took a chance and telephoned on Monday at the same hour as the previous week. She answered the phone. "No, it's all right," she said. "He's upstairs in the shower."

"I thought over what we discussed."

"And?"

"If I don't try, I'll wonder for the rest of my life."

"You have to be certain in your own mind, Corey." She sounded as if it had nothing to do with her. "You have to want me that much."

"That's one thing I couldn't be more certain about."

"All right," she said, lowering her voice and speaking quickly. "Wednesday night, day after tomorrow. Be here by nine-thirty. I'll leave a light on in the kitchen so you won't need a torch. Force your way in—don't be afraid to break the lock. Disturb some things in the library, then get the poker and wait inside the doorway. Jason will show up by ten minutes to ten at the latest."

"For sure? And he'll be alone?"

"Count on it, dear. He's the Greenwich Observatory time signal."

On Wednesday night at nine-fifteen, Corey Keith picked his steps along the garden path toward a rectangle of orange kitchen light. The perpetual English smell of wet grass hung about him like washed net curtains. On the porch, he put a knee and a shoulder against the door,

pressed hard, heard the spang as the flimsy lock let go, moved inside, closed the door, and stood breathing deeply. The kitchen smelled of fresh fruit and central heating. A yellow telephone hung on flowered vinyl wallpaper. If it rings, he thought, I'll drop dead right here on May's kitchen floor. The cops will have to come and cart my body away.

Out of the kitchen, down a dim corridor, into the carpeted area by the front entrance, then a right turn through a doorway two feet thick and he was in the library. Embers whispered behind the curved brass screen. He saw the heavy poker. Not yet.

There were silver trophies on the mantelpiece. These would do as evidence of the robbery in progress that Jason Hughes-Price must soon interrupt. Corey put his gloved hands on a cricket player and a golfer and took them to a settee, where he dropped them on the end cushion. Then he sat down. It was not even 9:30. He tried to think about the man he was about to kill but his mind refused to cooperate. Once as a lad in a cabbage field near Baytown he had tried to capture tiny white butterflies in his cupped hands. Their erratic flight had frustrated him throughout the broiling afternoon. The mental image of May's husband was like a cabbage butterfly. Corey put his head back and closed his eyes.

The door! He sprang to his feet, heart pumping, eyes on the tiny clock beside a photograph of May in pirate costume. Ten minutes to ten—he had fallen asleep—typical!

Corey took his place at the doorway and was listening to the owner drop keys on a table when he realized he didn't have the poker. Too late now—he would have to overpower the man somehow and use the poker afterward. Steps along the carpet, movement in the doorway, a hesitation.

Corey stepped forward, grabbed for a shoulder, felt arms fly up against his own, and then they were together in the light. Jason was not much taller than May. Corey put one hand on his throat, holding his lapel with the other. It was not an effective strangle but the producer's face went crimson, partly from his efforts to break the grip. Corey saw a tanned, half-bald head, round green eyes, and a thick moustache of the guardsman style, heavily waxed and shaped to spiky points.

Corey was astonished at his own lack of strength. This little man was on the verge of breaking free. It was all he could do to hold him. If he was going to succeed, he would have to get mad. Damn it, this was stupid!

Rocking back and forth, neither making a sound except for the spitting

gasps of men moving furniture, faces inches apart, the moment came when their eyes met. They saw each other. They stopped moving, still holding on, and then there was a softening in the green eyes. Fear went out of them. "You're about as good at this," Hughes-Price said, "as I am."

It was all over. Corey dropped his arms and stepped back. He began to tremble so hard he had to clasp his hands and hold on.

"I guess I came home too soon," the producer said. "Sorry if I scared you. But I like my Wednesday night football." He was standing very still, observing the intruder's face. "We could both use a drink. O.K.?"

Corey nodded. He waited until he had been handed a glass of Jason Hughes-Price's Scotch for the second consecutive week. He obeyed the older man's quiet order to sit himself down. They both drank.

Hughes-Price was still watching his face. "You don't look to me like a man who steals. Down on your luck?" When Corey did not reply, he said, "Cheer up—it isn't the end of the world. If I was going to call the police I would have done so by now."

"Thanks," Corey said. "I appreciate that."

"Ah—Canadian. Silly occupation for you to get into in this country unless you ditch that accent. A robber wants to be as anonymous as possible." He grinned and the waxed moustache-ends moved up and back. "I could give you speech lessons if you like. I'm a TV producer—I work with actors."

"I don't think I'm going to do this any more."

"Good. Then I've done one worthwhile thing today." Hughes-Price gave a rueful smile. "I steal in a different way. I take money for producing a very mediocre situation comedy, season after season. They say the public wants it—but that's no excuse for not doing better."

"Perhaps you will."

"At my age? I doubt it." He sighed and looked at his watch. "The only credit I give myself is being clever enough to hire a young Pakistani actor. Nobody else was touching him. Now I can say I gave him his start."

Corey watched Hughes-Price get up and move to the television set. "I'd better go now," he said. He would have to be gone when May arrived.

"Hang on—get yourself together." Jason pressed a switch and the television screen blossomed into the reds and greens of moving football jerseys as a martial theme introduced the game of the week. "Forgive me, I really am addicted. Do you follow football?"

"I like it," Corey said.

"Then stay. It's raining outside anyway." Hughes-Price brought the bottle and refilled both their glasses. "My boy," he said, "this is your lucky night. You happened to run into a man who instinctively understands you, who believes you can do better. Drink your drink. Cheers."

Corey was staring, half stunned, at the screen when there was a sound from the front door. The ball had been going into the net but he could not have said for money what the score was.

"In here, dear," Hughes-Price called. He winked at Corey. "My wife—she's a nice lady. Relax."

May Stanstead strode into the room, her red vinyl coat glistening with rain, a kerchief trailing in her hand. She glanced first at her husband, then looked at Corey very hard. "This is a friend," Jason said, his eyes following the action on the screen. "He came to rob us but changed his mind. I don't know his name."

Corey said, "Hello."

May smiled ferociously. "Hello, hello," she said. She bent to the hearth and picked up the poker. Before Corey could move, she went to the chair where her husband was sitting and stood over him, the poker raised. Jason looked up at her, smiling, his eyes alight with excitement for the lively game. He saw what she was about to do and his face began to change. The poker came down across his head as he half rose, knees bent, to plunge forward on the carpet, prone. May stepped back and struck her husband another glancing blow on the back of the head.

"Hey, come on, wait!" Corey was up at last, catching her arm, twisting the poker from her gloved hands, holding it away from her. She looked at his battered leather gloves on the table beside his glass and smiled faintly.

"Yes, all right," she said. She went to the television set and switched it off. Into the silence she said, "We are now back at square one."

"Wherever we are, it isn't square one."

"Shut up. I don't know what the hell you think you were doing. You were supposed to kill him and I find the two of you drinking and watching sports." She said the last word with a vicious sibilant at either end.

"Because he wasn't what you told me, May. Not what you described at all."

"Oh?"

"Yes, oh. I know a decent guy when I meet him. And what was all that about getting rid of the wog? He said good things about him. He's proud of discovering him."

"You are insane!" May screamed. "If you'd killed him first thing you'd never have heard any of that! We would have been all right!"

"I'm insane? I love your logic, Miss Stanstead." He set down the poker, picked up his gloves, and put them on. "I'm getting out of here."

"That's exactly right. And you're taking those trophies with you. I'll give you ten minutes and then I'll call the police. It's as if I'd just come in—everything as before."

"No way. You did this, not me. I'm not involved."

"You're involved, Corey. You slept with me, he's dead, and your fingerprints are on the poker. You couldn't be more involved."

Corey looked at the poker and considered wiping it clean. Then he thought again. "Right. I'll tell the truth, exactly as it happened. I was going to kill him but I changed my mind."

"That's a laugh. Who do you think they'll believe—you or me?"

Corey paused. Then he said, "I'll take my chances. You'd be surprised how the truth has a way of sounding right." He turned from her and headed for the kitchen. "I'll do us both a favor. I'll dial 999."

As he left the room, May did not hesitate. She went to a cabinet, opened a lower drawer, reached inside and took out an automatic pistol. She checked the magazine expertly. Then she hurried down the corridor, arriving in the kitchen as Corey was beginning to dial.

"Put it down," she said.

He saw the gun, put the phone back in the cradle, and stepped away from it.

"Now get out," May said. "Leave the way you came."

He moved toward the door, then stopped. "What about you?"

"Don't worry about me. I'll look after myself. You're the one who needs to worry."

He shrugged and said, "I'm sorry, May."

"Get stuffed," she said.

Corey turned to the door and she shot him in the back, chest high. He hit the pine-panelled wall, knocking to the floor a colander and a sieve and a breadboard. She left everything lying as she went to the telephone and dialed.

"Tony? You've got to come over. No, he's not—he's dead. I came in

and there was a robber here. He'd already killed Jason. He tried to go out the back door and I shot him." She began to cry real tears. "Come right now."

Tony Bhajwa arrived within ten minutes, parking his yellow MG beside the Common and running up the long walk to the house. May let him in and closed the door, embracing him, receiving his kisses on her tear-stained cheeks.

"Come on," he said softly. "You're not alone now. Where are they?"

"Jason's in there. The other one is in the kitchen."

He followed her to the kitchen, slowly approached the body on the floor, and bent to look at the wound and listen for signs of life. "He's dead, all right. Have you called the police?"

"I waited for you. I'll call now."

He went to her and she put her arms around his waist, pressing her cheek against the fabric of his shirt. His dark, handsome face touched her golden hair. "What a shock for you, my love."

"I'm all right now. I'm always all right with you." She stepped back and gave him the teary smile of a child whose hurt has been kissed and made better. "It has a good side, Tony. Now we can be married." She watched his reaction. "It's horrible that Jason is dead, but it lets us be together."

"I know." He nodded, sensitive eyes frowning. "But poor Jason. He was good to me. I'm going to miss him."

May shivered. "Time's going by. I'd better call the police and get it over."

As she dialed, Tony walked down the hall to the library. When May finished reporting the emergency and the address, she hurried after him and found him bending over Jason. He had turned her husband over onto his back and now had his ear close to Jason's face. "He's breathing," he said. "Jason is alive."

"What?"

"It's slight but steady. Listen."

May did not move. "He can't be."

"He is. If they get here quickly enough we may save him." Tony got up and came to May, looking hopeful. She passed him without a glance, knelt over her husband, and stared down at the bland unmarked face, the blood on the carpet coming from the wounds on his head. Yes, the

hairs in his nostrils moved slightly.

May reached for her handbag resting on the settee. She opened it and snatched out a linen handkerchief, dropped the bag beside her, folded the square into a pad. She placed this over her husband's nose and mouth and pressed down with both hands.

"May, what are you doing?"

"Keep away, Tony."

He put a hand on her shoulder but her voice and the expression on her face sent him back. "Don't, damn you! I'm sorry, Tony, but I'm right. We want to be together. We love each other. This is our chance."

"But you're murdering Jason!"

"Who says? He could be dead in a few minutes or a few hours. Or he could end up a vegetable. What kind of life would I have then? Would *we* have?"

"But give him his chance—"

"Too late, Tony. Jason had no chance from the day you and I met. It's us now. Don't spoil it."

The police were impressed by the situation. Not only two dead bodies on a damp night in Wimbledon Village, but the killings in the house of May Stanstead, the television actress. It was even a kick to see the funny wog waiter from the TV show sitting on the settee looking spaced out, which he undoubtedly was. What sort of stuff would they find if they searched *his* pockets?

But the case in point was the break-in, the murderous assault on the owner when he came in ahead of his wife and surprised the thief, and then Mrs. Hughes-Price's quick work with the pistol as she caught up with the killer in the kitchen. The Detective-Inspector took a statement from the shaken actress, then turned to Tony Bhajwa. May Stanstead spoke up for him. "He's very upset," she said.

"I can understand that. But you'll be able to support the lady's statement, sir, if you're asked at the inquest?"

Tony said faintly, "Not really."

"Sir?"

"I didn't arrive with May and her husband," he said. "It was all over when I got here."

"But it was as I said," May insisted.

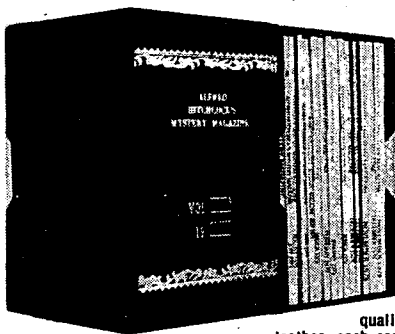
"Perhaps. One thing I did see though. Jason was still breathing a few

minutes ago. She put a handkerchief over his face and smothered him."

The Detective-Inspector was silent, listening, as if he had heard something that sounded like the truth.

"He's mad," May said flatly. "He must be hallucinating. He has a head full of cocaine most likely."

Tony Bhajwa turned smiling, pain-filled eyes on her. "I wish it were so. But, Inspector," he continued, "if you'll take that handkerchief from her handbag and have it analyzed, you're probably going to find it's got moustache wax on it."



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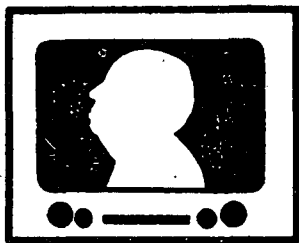
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CRIME ON SCREEN

by Peter Christian

"The British mystery hero is often an aristocrat," informs Gene Shalit, somewhat untruthfully. "The maddeningly perfect gentleman, he can isolate the Sudanese origin of your tobacco moments before you even light your pipe—and he can deduce your mother's maiden name from the cut of your vest." Shalit, in tuxedo, standing in a bizarre Victorian drawing room cluttered with stuffed owls, rhinoceros' heads, and eerie drawings of children (the set designed by Edward Gorey), is hosting a new series of fifteen television programs, an anthology show called *Mystery!* debuting later this month over the stations of Public Broadcasting.

Mystery! is the brainchild of Joan Wilson Sullivan of Educational Television's WGBH in Boston, who also nine years ago guided *Masterpiece Theatre* to our TV screens. "Everybody loves a mystery—a good mystery," Sullivan tells COS, and television has as yet not really programmed for that audience: people "of flexible intelligence, who don't just want adventure shoot-'em-ups, but wit and sophistication of plot."

The series has hopes of being the *Masterpiece Theatre* of mystery, and has many similarities with the older show: it will consist of imported British dramas, it is underwritten by Mobil (an open-end commitment, meaning that there are hopes for several seasons). As for all the dramas being British—a charge often leveled at PBS—"the United States and Great Britain have been exchanging mystery fiction since Poe began the

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form more than a century ago, to our mutual delight." Indeed, the ninety-minute premiere program of the series (the rest of the shows will be an hour in length) is *very* British, and quite obscure.

She Fell Among Thieves is a thriller by Dornford Yates, a prolific English writer of adventure and secret-service potboilers popular in the Twenties but hardly remembered today. (Neither Murder Ink nor the Mysterious Bookshop, New York City's two crime stores, have Yates on their shelves currently.) Resurrection is fine, however, even though the story is more melodrama than strictly mystery for the kick-off show, the production is deliberately high camp, and Shalit has the temerity to inform us that the screenplay writer took "a highly irreverent attitude toward the novel," keeping the title, the characters, a few twists, and throwing everything else away!

What saves the show is its lush settings (the castles and mountains of Wales substituting for the French Pyrenees) and a high caliber of acting, especially by Malcolm McDowell—who was also so good as H. G. Wells in the underrated *Time After Time* (a film which is not enjoying the success it deserves for the shocking reason, some say, that young audiences today no longer know who H. G. Wells *is!*). And Eileen Atkins, a character actress very familiar to *Masterpiece Theatre* followers, is deliciously amusing as the bizarre, murderous villain, Vanity Fair, imperiously leaning on her dragon's-cane, her face painted chalk white except for circles of blue around her eyes, plotting grand schemes: "I will *not* be bested, not even by the *best* man."

The time is 1922. In a forest castle filled with felons (and a fallen priest to do her bidding), Vanity conspires to marry off her stepdaughter—"She will marry the devil, if *I* choose"—in order to get her hands on the girl's fortune. But the groom-to-be betrays the plot, and Vanity has him killed. Young British aristocrat McDowell on holiday discovers the body in a stream while fishing and brings his terrible suspicion to the assistant British consul at Biarritz: "I think I saw murder done."

The consul—superbly played with square-jawed dash by Michael Jayston—is more than he seems, and darkly hints at secret-service connections. ("You see, I'm trusted, and so are others. But if you go down, you go down alone.") The groom was a forger, linked to the post-World War I fall of national currencies, a time when "you could buy a whole street in Cologne for a tenner." The young consul knows of Vanity Fair as well, and grimly catalogues for McDowell some of her lusts and allures.

"Men have died before firing squads rather than give her away, which suggests her influence is strong. I mean, they had nothing left to lose yet would not speak." Together the two Arrow-collar heroes—accompanied by their loyal manservants, aboard a shiny Rolls—take the high road to adventure, vowing to rescue a lass in danger and triumph over evil Vanity.

Naturally, Vanity has the best lines, and conjures up the most fiendish intrigues. For a few moments, McDowell is deceived by an actress—a ringer for the heroine—whom Vanity had previously threatened with white slavery in Rio or Shanghai. "It's worse, they say, in Shanghai." There are the most awesome deathtraps and hairbreadth escapes. At the end, a defeated Vanity is at her imperious best, taking the traditional exit of master villains and stealing the show as well. *She Fell Among Thieves* is perhaps a mite too lighthearted and arch to premiere so serious a subject as a mystery series, but it is very watchable fun. What follows after, however, is unqualifiably recommended. *Rumpole of the Bailey* is the stuff of great television.

Barrister Horace Rumpole was described by the *London Sunday Express* as a "lovable, irreverent, claret-swigging, Wordsworth-spouting criminal lawyer." No trim Perry Mason, Rumpole is heavy, middle-aged, disheveled, with a fondness for pubs and nasty-looking cigars; he is played with Falstaffian gusto by Leo McKern. We see Rumpole in his most private moments, at home in his bathrobe, barking at his wife—"she-who-must-be-obeyed"—and grouching over a lamentable lack of clients ("There's an unexpected outbreak of lawfulness. Someone should write in to the *Times* about it"); and at his most public, white lawyer's wig askew on his head, fighting for the defense of the accused in the Bailey.

His clients—the ones we meet in the four episodes to be shown on *Mystery!*—are a somewhat odd lot, and include a member of Parliament accused of rape, a burglar charged with blowing up a post-office safe, a murderer, and there is even a divorce case (with a charming surprise resolution). Through it all, frumpy, crumpley, irascible Rumpole peers at us through heavy-lidded eyes with unexpected gems of wisdom culled from years before the bench and experience out in the world. "Being a lawyer has almost nothing to do with knowing the law," he admonishes. Rather, "Lawyers and tarts are the two oldest professions in the world. We aim to please." Horace Rumpole—who was created by dramatist John Mortimer, also a famed barrister (he defended D. H. Lawrence in the *Lady Chatterley's Lover* trial)—pleases.

Classical romantic suspense follows Rumpole on *Mystery!*—a lush, period, retelling of Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*, shot on authentic locations in Cornwall and Monte Carlo. Redo the story Alfred Hitchcock filmed so definitively in 1940? Joan Wilson Sullivan hastens to explain that on *Mystery!* the novel will be dramatized in four one-hour episodes (the movie was only two and a half hours), thereby expanding the opportunities to do justice to the original novel. As a matter of fact, Du Maurier herself endorsed the adaptation after reading it; saying: "I truly do not think the present script could be improved in any way at all."

The most famous love story in mystery literature has the benefit once again of good casting. Jeremy Brett and Joanna David are Max de Winter and his second wife—both "truer" to the novel, Sullivan insists, than even Laurence Olivier and Joan Fontaine. (Hard to accept, especially considering Fontaine's devastatingly "right" performance.) Anna Massey—the talented daughter of Raymond—is a younger, feline Mrs. Danvers, perhaps more accurately expressing the covert relationship between herself and the dead Rebecca. The four-part drama is a handsome production of a sinister, spellbinding romance, and it will be good to walk the halls of Manderley again.

Mystery! then moves from fluff to tough, with the racing escapades of Dick Francis. *The Racing Game* comprises three hours with Sid Halley (Michael Gwilym), the champion National Hunt jockey who, when a serious accident ends his riding career, turns into a turf detective. The on-location settings include some of the most colorful racetracks in England today.

Halley will be followed by Peter Lovesey's beloved Sergeant Cribb, of Scotland Yard's Criminal Investigation Department, unravelling some of the most baffling crimes of Victorian England in three one-hour shows set in the 1880s, with carefully researched fashions and locales, fads and concerns of the period. Next month COS will report on just how well Dick Francis and Peter Lovesey have translated to television.

"Mystery is a generous genre," Shalit explains in the opening show of *Mystery!* "It yields to writers of farce, melodrama, horror, the supernatural, drawing-room comedy, suspense, and even science fiction. Mystery can encompass them all, because all are means to mystery's grand end: and that grand end is nothing but intelligent entertainment." And it's sentiments like that, Shalit and Sullivan, which make for a grand beginning.

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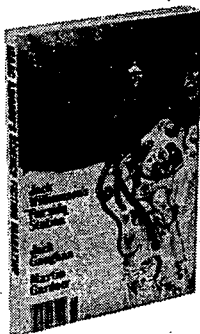
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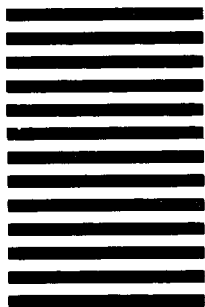
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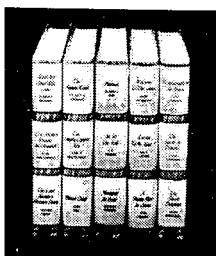
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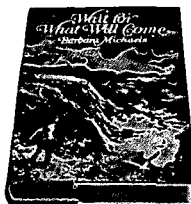
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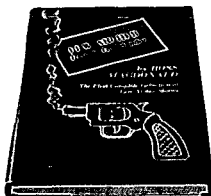
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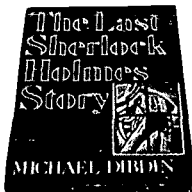
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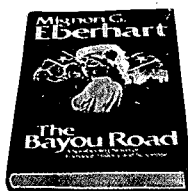
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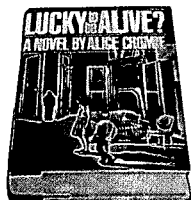
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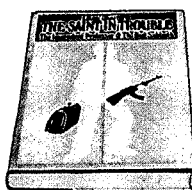
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